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THE WORKS

OF

ALPHONSE DAUDET

LIMITED EDITION

XV.

THE IMMORTAL

THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

Of the LIMITED EDITION of Alphonse Daudet one thousand copies have been printed for America.

This copy is Number 271

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Goupil & Cie Paris

THE WORKS OF

ALPHONSE DAUDET

THE IMMORTAL

TO WHICH IS ADDED

THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

TRANSLATED BY

GEORGE BURNHAM IVES

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE ROUX

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1899

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TO

MY DEAR PHILIPPE GILLE

AS THE MOST PARISIAN OF ALL MY LITERARY FRIENDS
I OFFER THIS STUDY OF MANNERS

A. D.

INTRODUCTION.

The Immortal was originally published as a serial in *L'Illustration*, beginning in the issue of May 5, 1888. The concluding instalment of the story appeared in the issue of July 7, and it was published in book form very soon thereafter. Since the appearance of *Sappho* in 1884, Daudet had produced nothing of serious importance except the second instalment of the adventures of Tartarin of Tarascon, and it is probable that he had had *The Immortal* in hand for several years.

The last word of the story had hardly been printed when the storm of criticism broke loose. It has been said that no other of the author's works had been so severely criticised as this, although he had been accused of ingratitude in his treatment of the Duc de Morny in *The Nabob*, and of political tergiversation and truckling in his selection and treatment of the leading theme of *Kings in Exile*, both of which accusations, if they needed refutation, seem to be clearly and satisfactorily refuted in the *Preface* to *The Nabob* and in the history of *Kings in Exile*;[1] and he had won the everlasting enmity of some too sensitive

[1] *Memories of a Man of Letters.*

Southerners by his frank exposure of some of the foibles of his fellow-natives of the Midi in *Tartarin* and *Numa Roumestan.* But all this was as nothing compared to the tempest that raged around the unhappy man who had ventured to cast ridicule upon the French Academy; for it would seem that, in the opinion of a large number, perhaps a majority, of Frenchmen, that "company of men of letters," founded by Cardinal Richelieu to establish and conserve the French language, is too sacred and venerable a thing to be spoken of save with awe and veneration. If we may judge by the criticisms which *The Immortal* called forth, this sentiment seems to be least sincere and least reasonable in the hearts of those critics whose language is most violent and savage; it may be that they knew their audience, and that this sort of *éreintement* was what it desired and would best appreciate; but we, of less excitable temperament, can be more readily brought to realize what there is in the Academy worthy of respect and veneration by the more moderate reasoning of those who, while deploring Daudet's satirical strictures, are nevertheless willing to admit that they had some other foundation than the hatred and spleen of a disappointed aspirant to the honor of the *habit à palmes vertes.*

I have selected, as illustrative of these two varieties of criticism, the articles of M. Ferdinand Brunetière in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of August 1, 1888, and of M. Jules Lemaître, dated

July 16 and August 20, 1888, contributed by him to I know not what periodical;[1] all, as will be seen, published very soon after the completion of the book. I may say, parenthetically, that both of these gentlemen have since been elected members of the Academy, — M. Brunetière in 1893, and M. Lemaître in 1895.

It is not extravagant to say that the article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* is a savage attack, not upon *The Immortal* alone, but upon Daudet, and incidentally upon Goncourt and Zola, the latter of whom certainly, in view of his untiring attempts to become an Immortal, seems hardly a fair subject for abuse in an article purporting to be a vindication of the Academy from an unjust attack upon it.

M. Brunetière begins thus: "If, in writing *The Immortal*, M. Alphonse Daudet proposed to deal the French Academy a blow from which the 'old lady' would never recover, he must have discovered since his book appeared that he has missed his aim, and that the game was not an easy one to win. Never, indeed, has there been so much talk about the Academy as since M. Daudet undertook to caricature it; never have better arguments been put forward to defend it, and never, so far as I personally am concerned, had I so fully realized the usefulness of its foundation, as on reading *The Immortal*. . . . Thus

[1] These articles are now published in *Les Contemporains, Études et Portraits Littéraires*, 4th Series.

do our purposes sometimes turn against ourselves. Not only will *The Immortal* have owed its success of a day, not to the popularity of the author of *The Nabob* and *Sappho*, but to the good name and, if I may say so, to the vitality of the Academy; but later, like so many other satires, it will owe its survival to the Academy, and not to the man of talent, of whose novels it is, we regret to state, beyond all question *one of the very worst.*"

Against this I place the opening sentences of the first of M. Lemaître's articles: "First of all, let me say that M. Alphonse Daudet has done nothing more brilliant, more sparkling, or more amusing; nothing wherein the observation of external things is keener, the expression more constantly original; nothing wherein he has succeeded more perfectly in displaying his acute vision, his nervous energy, his restlessness, his irony. A book like this is accumulated and condensed sensitiveness, a literary Leyden jar. The pleasure it causes one is almost too intense; there is in it a touch of the discomfort one feels on stormy days; as you turn the leaves, it seems that your fingers strike fire. . . . Even the most moderate minds," he continues, "refuse to share M. Daudet's sentiments. And in this connection there is a curious and touching fact to be noticed. People are not angry with M. Daudet, no; but they are grieved, and very sincerely grieved, by his irreverence and his injustice. *The superstition of the Academy is so strong in this*

country that many are incapable of realizing that a man who might be a member of it does not care to be. And thereupon they pity him for being so blind and for spurning so great an honor. And they do not believe in his sincerity. 'Oh! yes,' they say, 'that is what every one says. But you will come to it. Everybody comes to it at last.'"

It was perhaps natural that persons in the frame thus described, and ignorant of the facts, should have explained Daudet's apparent animus against the Academy by assuming that he was ambitious to be chosen a member, and was disappointed and soured by his exclusion. This suggestion was made so freely that, after some thousand copies of the book had been printed, Daudet inserted the prefatory note which will be found in this edition. But this emphatic denial did not satisfy all of his critics. Says M. Brunetière: "But the time when the Laniboires and the Ripault-Babins will triumph altogether will be when they reflect, and the public with them, that the Academy must still be of some consequence, a little more than a 'bait' or a 'mirage,' to induce a writer of the merit and talent of M. Daudet *to allow his chagrin at being excluded from it to appear.* Oh! I know that he will not agree that such is the fact; and I add that he will be perfectly sincere. M. Daudet never has been, is not now, and never will be a candidate. Like his sculptor Védrine, 'he snaps his fingers at success, the public, and the prizes of

the Academy.' He is the genuine artist for whom the approval of his conscience is sufficient. He has never written, he says, 'except for his personal enjoyment, because he felt the need of creating or of expressing his thoughts.' And if he has drawn his Laniboires and his Danjous, his Desminières and his Gazans with the features we have described, so much the worse for them; it is because he has seen them like that, and he has reproduced them as he saw them, and he has seen them as they are. But the public is so uncharitable that, even after all this, so much virulence will inevitably be regarded as a strange effect of such utter indifference. As he has no grudge against them of any sort or for any cause, — except perhaps for thinking that a history is of equal value with a novel, the work of the austere Henri Martin with that of the joyous Paul de Kock, — people will wonder how the author of *The Immortal* would have handled an academician if he had happened to have any reasons for bearing them ill-will. And they will look for reasons and will not find them, but they will imagine them none the less. And as it would not be consonant with the dignity of M. Daudet or with that of the Academy to suppose them to be personal, you see the consequence; we must conclude that the Academy is not so 'out of fashion,' in such danger of 'moulding under its dome;' and that the contentment of the fortunate author of *The Nabob* and *Sappho* is certainly a little sour, his

disinterestedness decidedly bitter, and his indifference savagely quarrelsome."

Now, it is made perfectly clear by certain observations of M. Lemaître, not only that Daudet might have become a member of the Academy had he chosen to do so, but that that fact was so notorious that it could properly be referred to as a matter of common knowledge. I quote from the second article, dated August 20th, 1888.

"I have waited, before recurring to *The Immortal*, until it should be a little less talked about, and until we could see if there were not something else in M. Alphonse Daudet's last novel than a satire on the Academy.

"The spectacle for a month past has been most diverting. We can see, from the uproar that the book has produced, how thoroughly our very marrow is permeated with the academic superstition. That is consoling. There is, then, some respect, some regard for the past, for tradition, still existing in France. Indeed it seems to me that the wrath aroused by *The Immortal* is as disproportionate as M. Daudet's feeling against the Academy.

"But no; this wrath is justified. For we have seen many men of letters spit upon the Academy in their youth, when it was not thinking of them, and become members of it in their maturer years; but, within my knowledge, no one has ever before seen an author, *who had but to make a sign to be*

admitted, publicly declare that he had no desire to be a member, and, the Academy having forgiven him, repeat that impertinent declaration." And again: "I think that a poor devil . . . would have, despite appearances, more merit than M. Alphonse Daudet in spitting upon the Academy, for it might bring him something, and by spurning it he would spurn real benefits. But M. Daudet, *declining the chair which was all ready for him,* declines nothing, for he already has everything, 'glory and fortune,' as in the ballad."

And a more recent writer, M. René Doumic, says upon this subject that "he had only to become a candidate, to be elected."[1] It seems to me, therefore, to be clear that *The Immortal,* whatever may have been Daudet's motive in writing it, was not inspired by the vindictive enmity of a defeated candidate.

M. Brunetière is ready with another motive or motives, to wit: "hatred of tradition, under the name of 'convention,' and frantic contempt of the past.

"It is the everlasting quarrel, which has been going on for three or four hundred years, between the 'moderns' and the 'ancients.' Listen to them. The hatred which they entertain for the French Academy, they entertain for everything that is founded on respect for tradition or love of the past, and they manifest it every day. They entertain it, for example, for the École des Beaux-

[1] *Portraits d'Écrivains.*

Arts and the École de Rome, where painters are taught that there were great painters before Édouard Manet and that the masterpieces of Bastien Lepage and little Maria Bashkirtseff are not the last word of art, except in the same sense that the old man's faltering speech imitates the lisping of the child. They entertain it for the Conservatoire, for the Comédie-Française, and for that classic repertory whose masterpieces, while maintaining a certain level of taste or refinement, prevent the crowd from running after the novels of M. Zola dramatized by M. Busnach, or the vaudevilles, now indecent, now pretentious, now dismal, of M. Paul Alexis and the young men who copy him. They have this same hatred for the Latin which is taught our children at school, because they always retain a smattering of it, and, even in the absence of any other advantage, it keeps alive in their minds a vague superstition of the things that were, respect for those who are called the masters, the popularity of the great names which embarrass and annoy them by stealing a part of the admiration which they would like us to reserve for their *Germinie Lacerteux*, their *Assommoirs*, and their *Immortals*. And, naturally enough, they hate the Academy more than all the rest, because it alone in literature, being unable, without destroying itself with its own hands, to disregard entirely the spirit of its institution, still represents to-day, even among us, what they pretend to call resist-

ance to 'modernity,' but what is, properly speaking, upholding the rights of the past."

Thus we are asked to believe that Daudet was consumed, unknown to himself, with ambition to become a member, and rancor because of his failure to become a member of an institution which he hated because it was the embodiment of respect and affection for the things he despised, and because its tendency was to divert the public from his own works! But, disregarding its attribution of inconsistent motives, does not the very violence of this article contain its own refutation to those who are familiar with Daudet through his other works, and who recall the notorious aversion of the reviewer to anything to which the name of *realism* can possibly be applied?

In a passage previously quoted we are told that, because, like Védrine, Daudet "snapped his fingers" at the Academy and its honors and its prizes, his attack upon it is inexplicable unless we can divine some hidden reason. Is it not more reasonable to assume that his reasons for snapping his fingers at it and for satirizing it were identical? May he not have said to himself that an institution, which was most valuable at the time when it was founded and for the purpose for which it was founded, had become somewhat of an anomaly in the present widely different state of society; that it was most irrational that literature and art should in these days be within the jurisdiction of a sort of court clothed with an

official character, in which vacancies were filled by election by the members thereof, notoriously, in many instances, for reasons entirely unconnected with literary or artistic eminence, — a court which is made up in large part of literary mediocrities, to say no more, and from which many of the most eminent geniuses of the century have been excluded for motives quite as discreditable as that alleged by "Desminières the novelist" for the exclusion of Balzac? And, while we agree that one who admits, in whole or in part, the truth of these facts, even though he be a true literary genius, may with perfect propriety aspire to a seat among the Immortals, must we not also agree that they make the Academy a fair subject for the ridicule and satire of one in whose eyes they seriously impair, if they do not destroy, its usefulness and its claim to veneration and respect?

M. Brunetière seems hardly to deny the accuracy of Daudet's figures; "the Laniboires and Ripault-Babins will triumph," he says; in which case they presumably exist. Indeed, the general tenor of the criticism seems to have been, not that the picture was false, but that it should never have been drawn at all, on account of the sacred character of the Academy, and that it was exaggerated. There are, it was said, some men of no great talent to be found among the academicians, who are chosen because they are respected and harmless; some who owe their seats to intrigue,

flattery, and female scheming; some who retain an inclination for women even to an advanced age; some who are not handsome; some who are infirm and peevish; but there are exceptions, there are some young men, some who are well-favored, some who owe their chairs to their talents; and if the rites and ceremonies are grotesque and the coat with green palm-leaves a mere plaything, why, they are inoffensive at all events.

It seems almost trivial to argue that M. Daudet nowhere claims that there are no members of the Academy to whom his strictures do not apply. Indeed, there were some among them who were dear friends of his own, and it does not appear that his satirical reflections upon the institution and upon some of their associates impaired their friendship for him. François Coppée, than whom no one has spoken more appreciatively and more affectionately of Daudet as a man and as a writer,[1] had been a member of the Academy four years when *The Immortal* appeared.

A year or two after the appearance of the novel, Daudet published the play called *The Struggle for Life*, a sort of sequel to *The Immortal*, in which the history of Paul Astier and his duchess is continued to the death of the former. The play had been previously acted (October, 1889), and had met with some success. When it was published, it was accompanied by a Preface, wherein, although the play itself contains no reference to

[1] See *Introduction to Memories of a Man of Letters.*

the Academy, Daudet grasped the opportunity to answer — and, so far as I have discovered, he made no other answer — the criticisms of *The Immortal.*

"I was afraid, above all, that the critics would make *The Struggle for Life* pay dearly for its near relationship to *The Immortal,* of which it is in some sort the prolongation and the consequence. But my fears were not realized. The press has manifested much good-will, or, at all events, impartiality. I have fancied that I could hear the dull rumbling of rancor decorated with green palm-leaves under one or two criticisms only, and I am surprised at it; there is not a single anti-academical line in my play. And, after all, of what was that so bitterly decried *Immortal* guilty? Of speaking disrespectfully of the French Academy? Why, what is respected, I pray to know, in these days? Has it not happened that academicians, yes, and some of the most famous ones, have maltreated persons who are, or are esteemed, most honorable? Did not Taine, of the French Academy, attack Napoléon, the most eminent individual of this century, in which men are measured by the standard of Bismarck? Do you consider that Renan, also an academician, treats Jesus Christ with great reverence in the biography of which more than three hundred thousand copies have been sold?

"But, because I took a few familiarities with this venerable Institute; because I ventured to

say that its favors, while they did no harm, proved nothing, that men of merit could very well do without its stamp of approval; because I was audacious enough to unveil the antics of that world of special intrigues, the manifold contrary currents of air that blow through its frigid corridors, the falls on its blind stairways, the bumps on the foreheads of the proudest who stoop to enter its low doors; because I pitied the distress of the candidates whom the Academy entices and drags in its wake by fallacious allurements; because, finally, I pointed out to youthful artists the snare laid for all their proud and independent instincts, — what a hue and cry, what outbreaks of wrath, and what insults! — even to the long indictment of M. Quesnay de Beaurepaire, who, the better to pay court to the Academy, lengthened out the passages he quoted from my book with indignant, shocked little stars, representing the ordure which he could not quote, and to which he attributed the scandalous popularity of the work."

In *The Immortal* Daudet returned to his earlier manner, from which he had departed for a moment in *The Evangelist* and *Sappho*, and once more we find, as in *The Nabob*, several distinct chains of events, whose interconnection is not always clear: the history of Astier-Réhu, the story of Freydet's candidacy, and the love-affairs of Paul Astier. The first two may be said to be connected, because they both relate to the Academy, but it is more difficult to connect the third with

either of the others. But this peculiarity of the writer, "who was a naturalist before naturalism was invented," — "who always describes and imparts the direct, immediate impression that things make upon his mind,"[1] had been accepted as a merit in *The Nabob*, and the "gallery of pictures, brushed in with the sweep and certainty of a master-hand," is almost more impressive in *The Immortal*, because of the extraordinary development in that work of Daudet's inimitable style. Several years prior to 1888, Henry James had written upon this subject, —

"It is difficult to give an idea, by any general terms, of Daudet's style, — a style which defies convention, tradition, homogeneity, prudence, and sometimes even syntax, gathers up every patch of color, every colloquial note that will help to illustrate, and moves eagerly, lightly, triumphantly along, like a clever woman in the costume of an eclectic age." And in the second of the articles heretofore quoted, M. Lemaître thus discusses the style of *The Immortal:* "Not one full, round sentence, oratorically or didactically turned. . . . Never was there such a prodigiously free use of all the 'figures of grammar,' abbreviations, anacoluthon, ellipsis, and what we should call, if we were speaking of Latin, ablative absolute. Sharp, quick, jerky, toc-toc phrases, like so many electric shocks. No hackneyed sayings; a scrupulous, feverish effort to express the

[1] M. Jules Lemâitre.

immediate sensation of objects by the fewest possible words and by the most expressive words or combinations of words. There is a constant invention in respect of style, so audacious, so quivering with life, and so sure that, aside from the best pages of Goncourt, nothing like it has been seen since Saint-Simon. Astier-Réhu might venture to say that it was perpetual hypotyposis."

The illustrations cited in support of this description are taken from two of the most striking pictures in the "gallery," — the dinner-party at Duchess Padovani's and the funeral of Loisillon; but examples quite as striking can be found on almost every page. Unfortunately, but inevitably, it is impossible to give in translation an adequate idea of these peculiarities of style, which impart an incomparable nervous force and vivacity to the original; an attempt to do more than suggest them would lead to an immeasurably harsh and unpleasant result.

It is needless to say that M. Brunetière can find nothing in *The Immortal*, either of character or incident, deserving of aught but censure. — "What does M. Daudet wish us to be interested in, if not in his rancor and spite?" — "To discharge his bile, M. Daudet has spent not less than three or four years in writing, with all his talent, one of his worst books," etc. Curiously enough, except for a grudging word of faint praise of *Sappho* and *The Evangelist*, to emphasize his condemnation of the earlier books and of *The*

Immortal, he pauses but once in his torrent of reproach, and then it is to defend Daudet on a point whereon nearly all the other critics agree in criticising him; that point is his treatment of the incident of the forged manuscripts, which plays so prominent a part in the story and which is founded on fact. M. Michel Chasles, an illustrious geometrician, produced between 1867 and 1869 divers manuscripts and autographs, the purport of some of which was to attribute to Pascal all the credit for the great discoveries of Newton. These manuscripts naturally gave rise to very animated discussions, and these discussions finally resulted in the discovery that M. Chasles had been for eight years the dupe of a forger and charlatan named Vrain-Lucas, who had entered into negotiations with him on the same pretext by which Albin Fage is supposed to have imposed upon Astier-Réhu. In those eight years he had given him one hundred and forty thousand francs for no less than *twenty-seven thousand* forged documents, including letters from Molière and Rabelais, letters from Pythagoras to Aeschylus and Sappho, from Alexander to Aristotle, from Archimedes to Nero, from Lazarus to the Apostle Peter, from Mary Magdalen to her "beloved father" Peter, from Cleopatra to Julius Cæsar (informing him that she proposed to bring her son to Marseille, and asking him if he expected to remain long in Gaul), and a passport from Vercingetorix — all, if you please, in old French!!

of the book; it seems to me, on the other hand, that we have only to assume that he was as sincere in his (mistaken) belief in his own greatness, as in the genuineness of his *Charles the Fifths*, and not only is there no inconsistency in his conduct, but the character takes its place among Daudet's best and most original creations.

Two of the small number of characters whom Daudet had introduced in more than one of his novels play prominent parts in *The Immortal.* Astier-Réhu himself is encountered by Tartarin, on the Rigi and at other places in the Alps, in the character of the *ineptissimus vir*, which title is there attributed to a rival historian, Schwanthaler, and not to Mommsen, to whom Védrine ascribes it in this volume. Colette von Rosen will be remembered as one of the principal characters in *Kings in Exile*, where she appears in a somewhat different, though hardly more favorable light.

Perhaps the most noticeable feature of *The Immortal* is the lack of sympathetic characters; Védrine alone seems to come measurably near deserving that epithet; and he is something too self-reliant, too well content to go his own way, alone and unassisted. This lack of characters who appeal to the sympathy and to the heart of the reader, while it may possibly lessen the popular quality of the book, detracts nothing from its power and interest; and we who do not live under the shadow of the dome of the Institute, and who

are not so permeated with the "superstition of the Academy," that we may not have it shown to us as it is, may well find *The Immortal* one of the most brilliant and entertaining, if not the pleasantest, of its author's works.

"I acknowledge that M. Daudet (and it is strange to have to make so simple a statement) has the right to entertain these sentiments," says M. Lemaître; "I acknowledge it with enthusiasm, and I am enchanted that he does entertain them, since he has written this book to express them."

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Photogravured by Goupil & Co., Paris, from Drawings by George Roux.

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THE IMMORTAL.

I.

UNDER the title ASTIER-RÉHU, in the *Dictionary of Contemporary Celebrities*, edition of 1880, we read the following: —

"Astier, otherwise Astier-Réhu (Pierre-Alexandre-Léonard), of the Académie Française, born in 1816 at Sauvagnat (Puy-de-Dôme) of a family of humble farmers, displayed in his early childhood a rare aptitude for history. Diligent studies, of a sort that is now rarely seen, begun at the college of Riom and completed at Louis-le-Grand, whither he was destined to return later as professor, threw wide open to him the doors of the higher Normal School. He left there to fill the chair of history at the Lyceum of Meude; there was written the *Essay on Marcus Aurelius* (crowned by the Académie-Française). Summoned to Paris the following year by M. de Salvandy, the young and brilliant professor was able to show his gratitude for the judiciously bestowed favor of which he had been the object, by publishing in rapid succession *The Great Ministers of Louis XIV.* (crowned by the Acadé-

mie Française), *Bonaparte and the Concordat* (crowned by the Académie Française), and the admirable *Introduction to the History of the House of Orléans*, that noble gateway to the work to which the historian was to give twenty years of his life. Then the Academy, having no more crowns to offer him, chose him to a seat among its elect. He was already, in a certain sense, in the family, having married Mademoiselle Réhu, daughter of the regretted Paulin Réhu, the famous architect, member of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, and granddaughter of the venerable Jean Réhu, dean of the Académie Française, the graceful translator of Ovid, and author of *Letters to Urania*, whose hale old age is the admiration of the Institute.

"The world knows with what noble disinterestedness Léonard Astier-Réhu, appointed by his friend and colleague, M. Thiers, archivist of the department of Foreign Affairs, resigned his post after a few years (1878), refusing to prostitute his pen and the impartiality of history to the exigencies of our present-day governments. But, separated from his dear archives, the writer used his leisure to good advantage. In two years he has given us the last three volumes of his history, and announces for early publication an *Unknown Galileo*, based upon most interesting, hitherto unpublished documents. All of Astier-Réhu's works are for sale by Petit-Séquart, at the publishing-house of the Academy."

As the editor of the *Dictionary of Celebrities*

intrusts to each subject the duty of describing himself, the authenticity of these biographical notices is not open to doubt. But why say that Léonard Astier-Réhu resigned his office of archivist? when everybody knows that he was dismissed, pulled down from his box like a simple cab-driver, for an imprudent sentence which escaped the historian of the House of Orléans, vol. v. p. 237: "Then, as to-day, France, being submerged by the flood of demagogy—"

How far a metaphor may carry one! The twelve thousand francs of his salary, apartments on Quai d'Orsay, heating and lighting, and furthermore that treasure-house of historical documents from which his books had drawn their life-blood; that is what that "flood of demagogy," his flood, swept away from him! The poor man was not consoled for the loss. Even after two years had passed, regret for the comfort and honors of his former post gnawed at his heart more savagely on certain days, at certain periods in the month or week, and principally on Teyssèdre's day.

He was the floor-scrubber, was this Teyssèdre. From time immemorial he had come to the Astiers' on Wednesdays; and in the afternoon of the same day Madame Astier received in her husband's study, the only presentable room of that third-floor suite on Rue de Beaune, débris of a fine mansion, majestic of ceiling, but terribly inconvenient. One can imagine the confusion into which the Wednesday, recurring every week, plunged the historian, interrupted in his labo-

rious, methodical plodding; he had conceived an intense hatred for the scrubber, his fellow-provincial, with his yellow face, as hard and rough as his lump of wax, — that Teyssèdre, who, on the pretext that he was from Riom, "whereas Meuchieu Achtier was only from Chauvagnat," jostled without the slightest respect the heavy table laden with note-books, memoranda, reports, and hunted from room to room the poor great man, who was finally compelled to take refuge in a garret with a sloping roof over his study, where, although he was of no more than medium height, he could not stand erect. Furnished with an old tapestry-covered arm-chair, with what had once been a card-table, and with a case for boxes, that old lumber-room was lighted from the court-yard by the arched top of the long window of the floor below; it formed a sort of low, glazed conservatory door in the wall, through which the historian in labor could be seen from head to foot, crouching painfully, like Cardinal Balue in his cage. There he was one morning, his eyes fixed on an ancient scrawl, when the door-bell rang in the apartment, then invaded by Teyssèdre's thunderous uproar.

"Is that you, Fage?" inquired the academician in his deep, metallic bass voice.

"No, Meuchieu Achtier; it 's your boy."

The scrubber tended the door on Wednesday morning, because Corentine was dressing madame.

"How 's the master?" called Paul Astier as he hurried toward his mother's room. The acade-

mician did not reply. His son's satirical habit of calling him "Master, dear master," in mockery of the title which people generally used in flattery, always wounded him.

"Show Monsieur Fage up as soon as he comes," he said, without addressing the scrubber directly.

"Yes, Meuchieu Achtier." And the thunder began anew to shake the house.

"Good-morning, mamma."

"Ah! here's Paul. Come in. Look out for the pleats, Corentine."

Madame Astier was putting on a skirt in front of the mirror; a tall, slender person, still comely despite the tired look of her features and a too fine skin. Without moving, she put forth her cheek, velvety with powder, which he brushed with his light, pointed beard, one as undemonstrative as the other.

"Has Monsieur Paul come to breakfast?" queried Corentine, a buxom peasant-woman with an oily complexion, and seamed with the smallpox, who sat on the carpet, like a shepherd in the field, engaged in mending the hem of her mistress's skirt, an old black rag; the tone, the attitude betrayed the familiar footing in the family of the poorly paid maid-of-all-work.

No, Paul had not come to breakfast. Somebody was waiting for him. He had his buggy at the door; he had come just to say a word to his mother.

"Your new English trap? Let me see it!"

Madame Astier walked to the open window and

partly raised the shades upon which the light of a lovely May morning shone in streaks — just enough to see the trig little equipage gleaming with new leather and varnished wood, and the servant in a new livery, holding the horse by the head.

"Oh, madame, how beautiful it is!" whispered Corentine, who was also looking out; "how sweet Monsieur Paul must look in it!"

The mother's face beamed. But windows were being thrown open on the opposite side of the street, people were stopping in front of the equipage, which aroused the interest of all that end of Rue de Beaune; and Madame Astier, having dismissed the servant, sat on the edge of a lounging chair, finishing the mending of the skirt herself, waiting to hear what her son had to say to her, with a shrewd suspicion of what it might be, although she seemed deeply engrossed by her sewing. Paul Astier, lying back in an easy-chair, seemed no more inclined to speak than his mother, but played with an ivory fan, an ancient article with which he had been familiar ever since he was born. To one who saw them thus the resemblance was striking; the same Creole skin, with a tinge of red over the light brown, the same flexible figure, the inscrutable gray eyes, and in both faces a slight blemish, hardly visible, an infinitesimal crookedness of the delicate nose, causing a cunning expression, a suggestion of unreliability. They watched each other in silence and waited, Teyssèdre's brush asserting itself in the distance.

"Very pretty, all this," said Paul.

His mother raised her head.

"What?"

With a studio gesture he pointed with the end of the fan to the bare arms, the outline of the shoulders beneath an under-waist of fine cambric. She began to laugh.

"Oh! yes, but there 's this, too." She pointed to her long neck, where there were wrinkles which betrayed her age. "Oh! but," she thought, "what difference does it make, since you are handsome?" but did not say it. That renowned talker, past mistress in all the frivolous gossip, all the falsehoods of society, expert in the art of saying or implying whatever she wished, was powerless to give expression to the only genuine sentiment she had ever felt.

In reality, Madame Astier was not one of those women who cannot make up their minds to grow old. Long before the curfew hour — perhaps indeed there had never been any very bright fire in her heart[1] — she had centred all her coquetry, all her feminine desire to triumph and to fascinate, her ambition for social and fashionable renown, in her son, — this tall, comely youth of twenty-eight, in the canonical outfit of the modern artist, the closely trimmed beard and short hair, and with the military grace in gait and carriage which service in the volunteers imparts to the young men of to-day.

[1] The French expression from which our word *curfew* is derived is *couvre-feu*, literally *cover fire;* the play upon words cannot be reproduced in English.

"Is your first floor let?" inquired the mother at last.

"Oh! yes, of course! — not a cat! signs, advertisements, nothing does any good. As Védrine said at his private exhibition, 'I don't know what the matter is, but they don't come.'"

He began to laugh softly; he remembered Védrine's tranquil, imperturbable pride amid his enamels and his statues, surprised but not vexed at the abstention of the public. But Madame Astier did not laugh; that superb first floor vacant for two years! — Rue Fortuny! a magnificent neighborhood, a house in the style of Louis XII., and built by her son! What more did they want, in Heaven's name? "They" were probably the same persons who did not go to Védrine's exhibition.

"But it 's a very good investment all the same!" she said, cutting her thread with her teeth.

"Excellent, but it takes money to keep it up." The Crédit Foncier gobbled up everything; then there were the contractors who were jumping on his back — ten thousand francs for cabinet work to be paid at the end of the month, and he had not the first louis toward it.

The mother, who was putting on her waist before the mirror, turned pale and saw that she turned pale. She shuddered as one shudders in a duel when his adversary's weapon is raised and pointed.

"Have you had the money for the restoration of Mousseaux?"

"Mousseaux! Long ago."

"And the tomb of the Rosens?"

"At a standstill. Védrine doesn't finish his statue."

"Why Védrine, then? Your father told you, you know —"

"Yes, I know. He's their *bête noire* at the Institute."

He rose and paced the floor.

"Come, you know me! I'm a practical man. If I selected him to make my figure, probably I had my reason for doing it."

He turned abruptly to his mother.

"You haven't ten thousand francs for me, I suppose?"

That was what she had been expecting ever since he came; he never came to see her for any other purpose.

"Ten thousand francs? How do you suppose —"

She said nothing more, but the heart-rending expression of the mouth and eyes distinctly said: "You know very well that I have given you everything; that I wear cast-off clothes; that I haven't bought myself a hat for three years; that Corentine washes my linen in the kitchen because I should blush to send such slop-shop stuff to the laundress; and you know that the worst misery of all is to refuse you what you ask. Then, why do you ask?" — and that mute objurgation on his mother's part was so eloquent that Paul Astier replied to it aloud: —

"Upon my word, I was not thinking of you. *Parbleu!* if only you had the money! But the master yonder," he added, in his cold, contemptuous manner; "perhaps you could get something out of him. You know so well how to take him!"

"No more now; that 's all over."

"But he 's working all the time; his books sell, you spend nothing."

In the half-light he scrutinized the shabby old furniture, worn-out curtains, threadbare rugs, not renewed since their marriage, thirty years before! Where did all his money go? "Oho! can it possibly be that the author of my days is a high-liver?" The idea was so monstrous, so improbable, Léonard Astier-Réhu a high-liver, that his wife could not help laughing in her sorrow. No, she thought that they need not be disturbed on that score. "But what do you expect? he is suspicious, he keeps everything to himself. The peasant buries his sous; we have taken too many of them from him."

They talked in undertones, like conspirators, their eyes fixed on the floor.

"How about grandpa?" said Paul, but without earnestness; "suppose you should try —"

"Grandpa? you are mad!"

And yet he was perfectly well acquainted with old Réhu, and his savage, quasi-centenarian's selfishness; knew that he would rather see them all die than go without a pinch of snuff or a single one of the pins which were always stuck in the lapels of his *redingote*. Ah, the poor

child! he must have been at his wits' end to admit such an idea into his mind!

"Tell me, do you want me to ask —"

"Whom?"

"Rue de Courcelles — an advance payment on the tomb."

"Not on any account! I forbid you to do it!" He spoke in a masterful tone, with pale lips and an ugly gleam in his eye; but he instantly resumed his unmoved, slightly scornful manner.

"Don't think any more about it — it 's only an emergency to be tided over. I have seen many others!"

She handed him his hat, which he was looking for, eager to go since he could extort nothing from her; and in order to detain him a few moments longer, she mentioned a momentous affair that was in negotiation, a marriage which had been intrusted to her to arrange.

At the word "marriage" he started and cast a furtive glance at her. "Whose marriage, pray?"

She had sworn not to mention it yet, but to him! "Prince d'Athis."

"Samy! Whom is he going to marry?"

She at once turned her artful little nose so that he saw its profile.

"You don't know her. A foreigner; very wealthy. If I succeed, I may be able to help you — conditions agreed upon, engagements entered into by letter."

He smiled, completely reassured.

"And the duchess?"

"She knows nothing about it, as you can imagine."

"Her Samy, her prince, a liaison of fourteen years' standing!"

Madam Astier made a gesture eloquent of a woman's savage indifference to the sufferings of another woman.

"Ah! so much the worse for her. She's getting old."

"How old, pray?"

"She was born in 1827. This is 1880. Reckon for yourself. Just a year older than I."

"The duchess?" ejaculated Paul, in utter amazement.

"Why, yes, you rude boy!" rejoined his mother, with a laugh. "You thought her twenty years younger, I am sure. But it's true, you see, that the greatest rake among you knows nothing about such things. However, you understand, the poor prince could not wear that halter all his life, especially as the old duke is bound to die some day or other, and then he would have to marry her. And can you imagine him married to that old woman?"

"Mazette! it's a pleasant thing to be a friend of yours."

She waxed excited. The duchess a friend! A pretty kind of a friend! A woman who, with six hundred thousand francs a year, intimate as they were, perfectly well acquainted with their straitened condition, had never once thought of coming to their assistance! — a dress now and

then, or an order on her milliner for a hat — useful gifts — not the sort that give one pleasure —

"Like Grandpa Réhu's birthday presents," said Paul, nodding assent, — "an atlas, a map — "

"Oh! I believe Antonia is even more miserly than he. Remember the prunes they gave us for dessert at Mousseaux, when Samy was not there, right in the midst of the fruit season. And yet there are orchards there and kitchen gardens; but everything is sent to market and sold at Blois or Vendôme. You see it 's in the blood. Her father, the marshal, was renowned for his miserliness at Louis-Philippe's court. And to be called a miser at that court! These great Corsican families are all the same; filth and vanity. They eat from silver plate, stamped with their crests, chestnuts that pigs would refuse. The duchess! why, she settles her steward's accounts herself; the joints are taken up for her to see every morning; and at night, in her lace night-dress, — I have this from the prince himself, — all ready for love, she balances her cash."

Madame Astier vented her spleen in her shrill, hissing little voice, like the cry of a sea bird perched on a mast. He listened, amused at first, then impatiently, anxious to be away.

"I must run," he said abruptly; "a business breakfast, very important."

"An order?"

"No. No architectural nonsense this time."

As she insisted curiously upon knowing what it was, he said:—

"I 'll tell you later; it 's well under way."

And before he took his leave he whispered in his mother's ear, as he kissed her carelessly, "By the way, think about my ten thousand."

Except for this tall son, who surreptitiously kept them apart, the Astier-Réhus would have formed a happy household according to worldly and academical ideas. After thirty years their mutual sentiments remained unchanged, kept carefully under snow at the temperature of a "cold bed," as the gardeners say. When, about 1850, Professor Astier, laureate of the Institute, asked for the hand of Mademoiselle Adélaïde Réhu, then domiciled with her grandfather at Palais Mazarin, the maiden's tall, refined beauty and her aurora-like complexion were not her real attractions in his eyes; nor was her fortune, for Mademoiselle Adélaïde's parents, both of whom had died suddenly of cholera, had left almost nothing, and her grandfather, a Creole from Martinique, a former beau of the Directory, gambler, rake, joker, and duellist, proclaimed loudly that he would not add a sou to the meagre dowry. No, the thing that seduced the child from Sauvagnat, who was far more ambitious than avaricious, was the Academy. The two great court-yards that he had to cross to carry the daily bouquet, those long, stately corridors, cut by the ends of dusty staircases, were in his eyes the road to glory far more than the road to love.

The Paulin Réhu of the Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, the Jean Réhu of the *Letters to Urania*, the whole Institute, in short, its lions, its dome, drew him on like a Mecca, and it was with all of those that he had lain on the night after his wedding.

That was a beauty that did not fade, a passion upon which time had made no inroads and which held him so tight that he maintained toward his wife the attitude of one of those mortals of mythological times upon whom the gods sometimes bestowed their daughters. Although he had become a god himself, as the result of four ballots, that respect was unchanged. As for Madame Astier, who had accepted marriage only as a means of escape from the anecdotal grandfather, a hard, selfish man, it had taken her a very short time to discover what an empty, hard-working peasant's brain, what a narrow intellect were concealed beneath the solemnity of the academic laureate turning out huge octavos, and the voice like an ophicleide, made for the pulpit. However, after she had succeeded, by dint of intrigues, solicitations, and begging, in procuring his election as an academician, she became conscious of a feeling of veneration, forgetting that she herself had clothed him in that coat with the green palm-leaves, wherein his nullity was lost to sight.

In that typical partnership, joyless, without intimacy or communication of any sort, there was a single human, natural note, the child; and

that note marred the harmony. In the first place, none of the father's dreams for his son were realized — neither laurels at the university, nor a nomination to take part in the great competition, nor the Normal School, nor the professorship. At school Paul won no prizes, except in gymnastics and fencing, and distinguished himself particularly by a persistent, wilful niggardliness which concealed a practical mind and a precocious realization of the meaning of life. He was extremely careful of his clothes and his person, and never went out to walk without the hope, openly avowed among urchins, of "beating up a rich wife." Two or three times, before he had finally adopted indolence as his rôle, his father had tried to discipline him brutally, in the Auvergne style; but the mother was always ready to excuse and protect. Astier-Réhu scolded, worked his jaw until it cracked — that protruding jaw which won for him the sobriquet of Crocodilus during the years of his professorship; and, as a last threat, talked about packing his trunk and returning to cultivate his vineyard at Sauvagnat.

"O Léonard! Léonard!" Madame Astier would exclaim in a soft, sly tone; and that was the last of it. One day, however, he was very near strapping his trunk for good and all, when, after a three years' course in architecture at the École de Beaux-Arts, Paul Astier refused to compete for the *prix de Rome.* His father stuttered with indignation: "Wretched boy — why, Rome—you — you don't know — Rome means the

Institute!" But the boy laughed at all that. What he wanted was money, and the Institute hardly supplied that — witness his father, his grandfather, and his great-grandfather, old Réhu. To get a start in life, to have a hand in affairs, large affairs, to make money at once — that was his ambition! and not palm-leaves on a green coat. Léonard Astier was speechless with indignation. To hear his son utter such blasphemies, and his wife, the child of the Réhus, approve them! His trunk was brought down from the garret forthwith, — his old provincial professor's trunk, studded with brass nails and hinges like the door of a temple, long and deep enough to have held the enormous pile of manuscript of "Marcus Aurelius," and all the dreams of renown, the ambitions of the historian marching upon the Academy. In vain did Madame Astier purse her lips and say: "O Léonard! Léonard!" nothing would prevent his packing that trunk. For two days it encumbered the centre of the bedroom; then it passed into the waiting-room, whence it did not stir again, being definitively transformed into a wood-chest.

At the outset, Paul Astier was successful; through his mother and her high social connections, as well as his personal adroitness and charm, he soon obtained commissions which brought him into notice. The Duchesse Padovani, wife of the former ambassador and cabinet minister, intrusted to him the restoration of her wonderful château of Mousseaux-sur-la-Loire, a

former royal abode, long neglected, to which he succeeded in restoring its true character with an ingenuity and cleverness that were really very remarkable in that mediocre pupil of the Beaux-Arts. His success at Mousseaux brought him the Turkish ambassador's new palace; and lastly, the Princess von Rosen employed him to build the mausoleum of Prince Herbert, who met a tragical death in Christian's Illyrian expedition. Thereupon the young man believed that fortune was in sight; the elder Astier, persuaded by his wife, supplied eighty thousand francs out of his savings for the purchase of a lot of land on Rue Fortuny, where Paul proceeded to build himself a mansion, or rather a wing of a mansion forming part of an elegant apartment house; for he was a practical youth, and although he wanted a mansion of his own like all fashionable artists, it was essential in his view that that mansion should yield revenue.

But, unfortunately, apartment houses do not always let readily, and the young architect's mode of life, — two horses in the stable, one for driving, the other for the saddle, the club, society, slow receipts, — all contributed to make it impossible for him to wait. Furthermore, Père Astier suddenly declared that he would furnish no more funds, and all that the mother could do or say in her darling son's behalf was blocked by that irrevocable decision, that obstinate resistance to her personal wishes, which had hitherto been the preponderating influence in the family.

Thenceforward there was a continual struggle, the mother resorting to strategy, cheating about the household expenses like an unfaithful steward, in order that she might never have to say no to her son's requests for money; Léonard suspicious and striving to protect himself by verifying the bills. In that humiliating contest, the woman, who was the more successful, was the first to grow weary; and her son Paul must have been really in serious straits to induce her to venture a fresh attempt.

As she entered the dining-room, a long, gloomy apartment, dimly lighted by high, narrow windows, which were reached by two steps, — before they occupied it, it was a table d'hôte for priests, — Madame Astier found her husband already at table, with something very like a complaining expression on his face. Ordinarily the master brought to his repasts a countenance smiling and serene, like his appetite, fortified by sound mountain-dog's teeth, which nothing could resist — not the stale bread, nor the tough meat, nor the diverse unpleasant incidents with which every day of his life seasoned them.

"Teyssèdre's day, of course," thought Madame Astier, and she sat down with a great rustling of her reception-day dress, a little surprised not to receive the compliment with which he never failed, on Wednesdays, to greet her costume, shabby though it was. Confident that his ill-humor would vanish with the first mouthful, she waited a moment before beginning the attack.

But the master, while continuing to eat voraciously, exhibited symptoms of growing displeasure; the wine was corked, the forced-meat balls were burned.

"This is all because your Monsieur Fage did n't come this morning," cried Corentine, in a rage, from the adjoining kitchen, as her shiny, seamed face appeared at the hole in the wall through which the dishes were passed in the days of the table d'hôte. When she had closed it violently Léonard Astier muttered, "What an impudent hussy!" — in reality sorely annoyed because that name Fage had been mentioned before his wife. And we may be very sure that at any other moment Madame Astier would not have failed to say: "Oh, yes, that Fage again — that binder of yours again!" and that a family quarrel would have ensued; a result which Corentine had in view when she interjected her treacherous remark. But to-day it was most important not to vex the master, but, on the other hand, to lead him, by adroit preliminary manœuvres, to what she wanted to obtain from him; for instance, by discussing the health of Loisillon, the perpetual secretary of the Academy, who was said to be sinking gradually. Loisillon's office and his apartments at the Institute were expected to be bestowed upon Léonard Astier as compensation for the office he had lost; and although he was on the most friendly terms with this dying confrère, the hope of a handsome salary and a commodious and airy dwelling, together with certain other

advantages, enveloped that approaching death with pleasant prospects of which Léonard was ashamed perhaps, but which he discussed artlessly in the bosom of his family. But not even that would smooth the wrinkles from his brow to-day.

"Poor Monsieur Loisillon," hissed Madame Astier; "it seems that he can't find his words now. Lavaux told us at the duchess's yesterday that he can't say anything but 'bi-bibelot, bi-bibelot!' — And he 's on the dictionary committee too!" she added, pursing her lips.

Astier-Réhu did not move an eyebrow.

"That 's a good joke," he said, making his jaw crack, with his professional air. "But I have said somewhere in my history: 'In France nothing endures but the provisional.' For ten years now Loisillon has been dying. He will live to bury us all." He repeated fiercely, biting at his dry bread, "all, all!"

Teyssèdre had evidently turned him all awry.

Thereupon Madame Astier spoke of the great meeting of the five Academies to be held within a few days, at which the Grand Duke Leopold of Finland was to be present. It happened that Astier-Réhu, being director for that quarter, was to preside at the session and to deliver the opening address, with a complimentary reference to his Highness. And being adroitly questioned concerning that discourse, upon which he was already at work, Léonard mentioned its main points: an irresistible attack upon the modern literary school, a sound thrashing pub-

licly administered to those beggarly rascals, those baboons!

His great glutton's-eyes burned brightly in his square face, while the blood ascended to the dense, bristling eyebrows, which were still coal-black, contrasting strongly with the fringe of white beard.

"By the way," he said sharply, "my coat. Have you looked at it? When I wore it last, at Montribot's funeral — "

As if women did not think of everything! Madame Astier had inspected the Academician's coat carefully that very morning. The palms were wearing out, the lining would not hold together. It was an old coat. It dated from — *mon Dieu!* from the day of his reception, October 12, 1866. The best plan would be to order a new one for the great occasion. The five Academies, a Royal Highness, and all Paris sure to be there. He certainly owed them that.

Léonard protested feebly, alleging the great expense. If he had a new coat he must replace the waistcoat; yes, the waistcoat at least, and then the trousers would not look decent.

"It 's a necessary expense, my dear."

She persisted. Unless they were careful, they would make themselves ridiculous with their economy. Many of the things around them were growing old; for instance, the furniture in her room; she was ashamed of it when a friend came to see her, and for a comparatively trifling sum —

"Bah! what a booby!" muttered Astier-Réhu,

who was wont to borrow freely from the classic vocabulary. The wrinkle in his forehead reappeared like a window-bar, closing his face, which had been wide open for a moment. So many times he had supplied the wherewithal to pay a milliner's or dressmaker's bill, to renew hangings or table linen; but no bills were settled, nothing was bought, and the money found its way to the spendthrift on Rue Fortuny; he had had enough of that and he was not to be caught again. He rounded his back, turned his eyes upon his plate, which was filled with a huge slice of Auvergne cheese, and said no more.

Madame Astier was familiar with the obstinate silence, the yielding resistance like that offered by a ball of cotton, as soon as money matters were mentioned between them; but this time she had sworn to make him reply.

"Ah! you roll yourself into a ball. I know what it means when you make a hedgehog of yourself. No money, eh? none at all, none at all, none at all?"

The back became rounder and rounder.

"You find money for Monsieur Fage, though."

Léonard Astier started, sat up, and glanced at his wife uneasily.

"Money! for him! for Monsieur Fage!"

"Why, all your binding costs money," she continued, overjoyed to have forced him out of his silent resistance; "and why do you need to have all these old papers bound, I should like to know?"

He breathed more freely. Evidently she knew nothing, she was firing at random. But that phrase "old papers" lay heavy on his heart; autographic documents of unrivalled interest, letters signed by Richelieu, Colbert, Newton, Galileo, Pascal, marvellous treasures bought for a mere pittance and representing a fortune. — "Yes, madame, a fortune." He became excited, mentioned figures, offers that had been made him. Bos, the famous Bos of Rue de l'Abbaye — and he was a man who knew what he was about! — stood ready to give twenty thousand francs just for three documents in the collection, three letters from Charles the Fifth to François Rabelais.

"Old papers indeed! oh, yes!"

Madame Astier listened in stupefied silence. She knew that he had been at work collecting old papers for two or three years; he sometimes mentioned the treasures he had found, but she always listened to him with the vague, distraught ear of a woman who has heard the same man's voice for thirty years; certainly she never had suspected anything like this. Twenty thousand francs for three letters! — why, in Heaven's name, did he not accept the offer?

The good man burst forth like a bomb, —

"Sell my Charles the Fifths? Never! I would see you all want for bread, go from door to door begging, before I would part with them, you understand!" He brought his fist down on the table, very pale, with his jaw protruding, a fierce, maniacal creature; an abnormal Astier-Réhu,

whom his wife did not recognize. Many men exhibit themselves thus in the sudden outburst of some passion, in aspects unfamiliar to their closest friends. Almost instantly, however, the academician became very calm once more and explained his meaning, a little shamefacedly; those documents were indispensable to him for perfecting his book, especially now that he no longer had the archives of the Foreign Office at his disposal. To sell those materials would be to abandon writing! So that he thought rather about adding to them. And concluding in a bitter yet affectionate strain, in which one could read all the regrets, all the disappointments of his fatherhood, he said, —

"When I am dead, my son can sell them all, if he chooses; and as his only desire is to be rich, I assure you that he will be content."

"Yes, but meanwhile —"

That "meanwhile" was said in such a soft, flutelike tone, so egregiously natural and tranquil, that Léonard, consumed with jealousy of that son who stole his wife's whole heart from him, replied with a solemn twist of his jaw, —

"Meanwhile, madame, let other people do as I do. I have no fine house, no horses, no English trap. I am content with the tramway for my going about, and for apartments, I have a third-floor suite, where I am the prey of Teyssèdre; I work night and day, I pile up volumes, two or three octavos a year; I am on two committees of the Academy, I never miss a session; I am

present at all burials; and I even decline all invitations to make visits in summer, in order not to lose a single fee for attendance. I trust that monsieur my son, when he is sixty-five years old, will show as good courage!"

It was the first time in a long while that he had spoken of Paul; and he spoke so bitterly! The mother was silenced, and in the furtive, almost cruel glance which she cast at her husband, there was a tinge of something like respect which was lacking a moment before.

"There 's the door-bell," said Léonard, hastily; he had already risen and thrown his napkin over the back of his chair. "It must be my man."

"Some one for madame; they are beginning early to-day."

Corentine placed a card on the edge of the table with her fat cook's-fingers, hastily wiped on her apron.

Madame Astier glanced at the card, — "Vicomte de Freydet;" her eyes flashed. She said aloud, in a calm tone which concealed her joy, —

"So Monsieur de Freydet is in Paris?"

"Yes, about his book."

"Ah! *mon Dieu!* his book. And I have never cut the leaves. Tell me what the book 's about."

She hurriedly swallowed her last mouthfuls and dipped the ends of her fingers in her finger-bowl, while her husband absent-mindedly gave her a few hints about Freydet's new volume — "God in Nature" — a philosophical poem. He was competing for the Boisseau prize.

"Oh! he will get it, won't he? He must get it. He and his sister are so nice! He is so kind to that poor paralytic!"

Astier made an evasive gesture. He could not promise anything, but he should certainly recommend Freydet, who seemed to him to be making real progress. "My personal opinion of the book, if he asks you, is this: there is a little too much of it for my taste, although much less than in his other books. And tell him that his old master is content."

Too much of what? of what was there less? Madame Astier probably knew, for, without asking for explanations, she left the table and passed lightly into the study, transformed into a salon for that day.

After she had disappeared, Léonard Astier, more and more preoccupied, sat for a few moments crumbling with his knife the little Auvergne cheese that remained on his plate; then, disturbed in his reflections by Corentine, who cleared the table in haste, paying no heed to him, he rose slowly, and returning to his garret by a narrow staircase resembling the ladder of a mill, he took up his magnifying-glass and resumed his examination of the old scrawl by which he had been absorbed all the morning.

II.

"Hi! hi!" In the two-wheeled trap which he drives himself, Paul Astier, erect and faultlessly attired, the reins high in air, is bowling along at a rattling gait to his mysterious business breakfast; by Pont Royal, the quays, Place de la Concorde. In that stage-setting of terraces, greenery, and water, with a slight effort of the imagination he may well believe that he is being borne upon the wings of fortune, the road is so smooth, the weather so glorious; but the boy has not a mythological brain, and as he rolls along he inspects the new leather of the harness and makes inquiries about the grain-dealer from the stocky young groom, who crouches beside him with the scoffing, surly expression of a stable terrier. It seems that the grain-dealer is another of those who are making trouble about supplies.

"Ah!" says Paul, absent-mindedly, already thinking of something else. His mother's confidential disclosures are stirring in his mind. The lovely Antonia fifty-three years old! That back, those shoulders, the most perfect décolletée of the season! God! it is n't credible. — "Hi there!" — He remembers her at Mousseaux last summer, the first person astir in the house, walking in the park with her dogs, in the dew, her

hair flying, her face fresh as a rose. — She certainly had not the look of a made-up woman. — And he remembers how one day, in the landau, he had been squelched, oh! yes, completely squelched, without a word, simply with a glance, like a servant, just for having brushed against a long, shapely, solid, Hebe-like leg. — That leg fifty-three years old! — never in the world! — "Hi! hi! look out there!" — What a nasty place it is, that turn from the *rond point* into Avenue d'Antin! — Never mind! it is a vile trick to play on that poor woman, to marry her prince. For, no matter what mamma says, the duchess's salon has been mighty useful to them all. Would the father be in the Academy except for her? — and he himself and all his orders. And the Loisillon succession, the prospect of those fine quarters under the dome. No, there's nothing like a woman for treachery. And as to the men — When you think of all she has done for this d'Athis! He was ruined, played out, a wreck, when they met. To-day, minister plenipotentiary, member of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, all on account of a book of which he didn't write a word — "Woman's Mission in the World." And while she's at work to pull down an ambassadorship for him, he's only waiting until his appointment is gazetted in the "Officiel," to decamp *à l'Anglaise*, and after fifteen years of unalloyed happiness, play such a scurvy trick on his duchess! There's one man who understands the mission of woman in the world. "I must

look out and not be more of a greenhorn than he. — Hi! hi! gate, please!"

The monologue is at an end, the trap standing in front of a house on Rue de Courcelles, the gate of which opens slowly, heavily, as if performing a task to which it had been long unaccustomed.

In that house Princess Colette von Rosen had been living the life of a cloistered nun since the tragic episode that made her a widow at twenty-six. The chronicles of the period have described the young widow's noisy despair, the fair hair shaved close to the head and thrown into the coffin, the bedroom transformed into a *chapelle ardente*, the solitary repasts with two covers, and the prince's hat and gloves and cane in their usual place on the table in the reception-room, as if he were there, as if he were just going out. But something to which nobody had referred was the affectionate devotion, the almost maternal solicitude of Madame Astier for the "poor little dear" under those painful circumstances.

The intimacy between those ladies dated back several years, to the time when a prize for a historical work was awarded by the Academy to Prince von Rosen, on the report of Astier-Réhu; the difference in age and rank, however, made a chasm between them which was bridged over by the princess's mourning. In her notorious rupture with society Madame Astier alone was excepted; she alone was allowed to cross the threshold of

the palace, transformed into a convent, where the poor, shaven Carmelite wept in her black robes; to her alone was vouchsafed the privilege of hearing mass said twice a week at Saint-Philippe for the repose of Herbert's soul, and also the letters which Colette wrote every evening to her dear departed, telling him of her life and how she employed her days. In her mourning due attention was paid to the most rigid material details which dishonor grief, but which the world exacts; orders for liveries, trappings for carriages, the heart-sickening interviews with the hypocritical, whining undertaker; all these details Madame Astier had taken charge of with untiring patience; and, assuming the guardianship of that household, which lovely eyes dimmed with tears were unable to manage, she spared the young widow everything that could possibly interfere with her despair, her hours for praying, weeping, corresponding with the "beyond," and carrying armfuls of rare flowers to Père-Lachaise, where Paul Astier was superintending the construction of the gigantic mausoleum in commemorative stone brought from the place of the catastrophe in accordance with the princess's wish.

Unfortunately the quarrying and transportation of that Dalmatian granite, and the difficulty of cutting it, in addition to the innumerable plans, the varying whims of the widow, who considered nothing grand enough, ostentatious enough for such a man as her dead hero, had caused so many hindrances and delays, that in May, 1880, two

full years after the disaster and the beginning of the work, the monument was still unfinished. Two years is a long while for a demonstrative grief, always at the paroxysmal point, ready to sacrifice itself once and for all. To be sure, the mourning was still kept up, apparently as austere as ever, the house tightly closed and silent as a cavern; but instead of the living statue, always praying and weeping in the depths of the crypt, there was now a young and pretty woman, whose hair was growing afresh in silky abundance, with rebellious bursts of renewed life, with curls and wavy locks.

The black widow's-weeds were lighted up and enlivened by that mass of golden hair, and seemed only a whim of fashion; and in the princess's voice and bearing one could detect the springtime activity, the relieved, tranquil air which we remark in young widows in the second stage of their mourning. A charming stage. The woman tastes for the first time the delight of that enfranchisement, of that untrammelled possession of herself which she has never known, having passed from the custody of the family to that of the husband when a mere girl; she is delivered from the sensuality of the husband, and above all from the fear of having children, from that terror in love which is the characteristic of the young wife of to-day. And the perfectly natural evolution from overflowing grief to perfect resignation was emphasized by the paraphernalia of inconsolable widowhood with which Princess Colette continued

to surround herself; not from hypocrisy — but how, without causing the servants to smile, could she order that hat and cane, which had been waiting so long in the reception-room, to be taken away, or that cover always laid for the departed? How could she say, "The prince will not dine with me to-night"? The mystic correspondence alone — "To Herbert, in heaven" — had begun to die out, becoming less voluminous from day to day, and being reduced at last to a journal, written in a very calm tone, which amused Colette's intelligent friend, although she said nothing.

For Madame Astier had her plan, an idea that had germinated in her astute little brain one Tuesday evening at the Français, on listening to this whispered confidence from Prince d'Athis: "Ah! poor Adélaïde! what a dose she is! how tired I am of her!"

She instantly thought of marrying him to the princess; that would be a new game, just the opposite of the other, and no less delicate and fascinating.

She must no longer preach the eternal sanctity of oaths, search in Joubert or other virtuous philosophers for sentiments like this, copied by the princess at the head of her marriage book: "A person can marry and be widowed but once with dignity;" nor go into ecstasies over the manly charms of the young hero, whose likeness, full-length, half-length, profile, three-quarters front, painted and carved, confronted one all over the house.

On the contrary, a shrewd and carefully graduated depreciation: "Don't you think, dear love, that these portraits of the prince make his lower jaw too heavy? — to be sure, I know that it was a little too large, a little thick;" and by dint of tiny, poisoned strokes, delivered with infinite gentleness and address, turning back when she had gone too far, watching to see if Colette smiled at some significant insinuation, she succeeded in making her agree that her Herbert had always been a good deal of a swashbuckler, more of a gentleman in name than in manners, lacking the noble air of the Prince d'Athis, whom they met the other Sunday on the steps of Saint-Philippe. — "If your heart says yes, he 's a marriageable man, my dear." — This was tossed in the air in a jesting tone, then repeated, put forward more clearly. Well, why not? all the proprieties would be satisfied; and there would be no change in the coronet or the title, a fact which was of much importance from a family point of view: "And, if I must say it, my dear, a man who has the warmest feeling for you."

That word "feeling" wounded the princess like an insult at first, but she accustomed herself to hearing it. They met d'Athis at church, then on Rue de Beaune, with the greatest secrecy, and Colette soon agreed that he alone could induce her to renounce her widowhood. But what was she saying? her poor Rosen had loved her so devotedly, his heart was so wholly hers!

"Oh! wholly!" echoed Madame Astier with a

knowing little smile, followed by hints and veiled words, and, as always, by the poisoning of woman by woman. "Why, my dear, there is no such thing as a single love, a faithful husband; honest, well-bred men arrange not to sadden or humiliate their wives, not to breed trouble in their households."

"Then you think that Herbert—?"

"*Mon Dieu!* like all the rest."

The princess rebelled, pouted, overflowed in those ready, griefless tears, from which a woman emerges soothed and refreshed, like a lawn after a shower. She did not give way, however, to the great annoyance of Madame Astier, who was far from suspecting the real cause of her resistance.

The truth was that, by dint of examining together the plans of the mausoleum, with their hands and their hair touching as they leaned over the sketches of tombs and mortuary monuments, Paul and Colette had conceived for each other a feeling of fellowship which had gradually become more and more affectionate down to the day when Astier detected in a glance that she bestowed upon him the perturbed expression of a fancy, almost an avowal. This possibility, this dream, this prodigy of prodigies suddenly arose in his mind: Colette de Rosen marrying him, bringing him her twenty or thirty millions. Oh! later, of course, after a period of patient waiting, a formal siege of the citadel. Before everything he must be on his guard against mamma, who was very adroit, to be sure, very strong, but liable

to sin through excess of zeal, especially when her Paul was concerned. She would destroy all their chances in her endeavors to hasten a successful result. So he concealed his designs from Madame Astier, never suspecting that she was digging a countermine on the same road; and he carried on his campaign alone, very slowly, fascinating the princess by his refined manners, his flow of spirits, his mocking wit, whose claws he was careful to conceal, knowing that woman, like the common people, like the child, like all artless, spontaneous beings, detests the irony which disconcerts her, and which she feels to be antagonistic to the enthusiasms and meditations of love.

On this spring morning young Astier made his appearance with more confidence than usual. It was the first time that he had breakfasted at the Rosen mansion, the pretext being a visit that they were to pay together to Père-Lachaise to inspect the work on the spot. They had selected Wednesday, Madame Astier's reception day, by tacit agreement, in order not to take her with them; so that, despite his reserve, the young man, as he ran up the steps, glanced carelessly at the spacious courtyard and the sumptuous offices a circular, all-embracing glance, like a taking of possession. His enthusiasm cooled somewhat as he passed through the reception-room, where door-keeper and footmen, in dismal deepest mourning, were dozing on benches, as if keeping the death watch around the dead man's hat, a superb

gray hat, proclaiming the arrival of summer and the princess's obstinacy in remembering forever. Paul was vexed, as if he had met a rival; he did not realize how difficult it was for Colette, her own prisoner, to escape from her intense mourning. And he was asking himself, in a passion, "Does she propose to make me breakfast with him?" when the valet who took his cane and his hat informed him that Madame la Princesse was awaiting monsieur in the small salon. He was ushered at once into the glass-walled rotunda, green with rare plants, and was comforted by the spectacle of two covers laid on a tiny table, the arrangement of which Madame von Rosen was superintending in person.

"A fancy that came into my mind when I saw this lovely sunshine; it will be as if we were in the country."

She had ruminated all night as to how she could avoid breakfasting with that handsome youth in presence of the other's plate; and as she could devise no plan to keep the servants from talking, it had occurred to her to surrender the field, to give the order suddenly, as if in obedience to a caprice: "In the conservatory."

Truly the business breakfast promised well. The white Romanée cooling in the little rock-work bowl, among ferns of many species; the sunlight on the glasses, on the polished green of the serrated leaves, and the two young people seated opposite each other, their knees almost touching, he very calm, his light eyes gleaming

and cold, she all pink and white, her hair arranged like fine, wavy plumage, outlining the shape of her little head without the slightest resort to the artifices of feminine hairdressing. And while they talked of indifferent subjects, concealing their real thoughts, Paul Astier felt a thrill of triumph as he saw in the deserted dining-room, the doors of which were constantly opened as the servants passed silently in and out, the dead man's cover, relegated for the first time to the tedium of solitude.

III.

To Mademoiselle Germaine de Freydet,
Clos-Jallanges, near Mousseaux (Loir-et-Cher) :

HERE follows, my dear sister, an accurate account of the way I employ my time in Paris. I intend to write such an account every evening and send you the package twice a week, so long as I stay here.

This, Monday, morning then, I arrived. Alighted, as always, at my quiet little hotel on Rue Servandoni, where I hear nought of this vast Paris save the bells of Saint-Sulpice and the constant noise of a forge near by, the rhythmical hammering on iron which I love as a reminder of our village. I went at once to my publisher.

"When do we appear?"

"Your book? why, it appeared a week ago."

Appeared, yes, and disappeared in the recesses of that terrible Manivet establishment, always smoking, panting, in travail of some new book. This very Monday was the day of issue of a great novel by Herscher, *La Faunesse*, of which I don't know how many times fifty thousand copies have been printed and were lying in piles and bundles from floor to ceiling of the warerooms;

and you can imagine the confused faces of the clerks, the bewildered air, as if he had just fallen from the moon, of the excellent Manivet, when I mentioned my poor volume of verses and my chances for the Boisseau prize. I asked for a few copies which I intend for members of the committee, and made my escape through the lanes, genuine lanes of *La Faunesse* rising to the ceiling. In the cab I looked at the volume and turned over the leaves; I was pleased with the gravity of the title, "God in Nature;" on reflection, the letters of the title were perhaps a little slender, not black enough, ill-adapted to attract the eye; but, pshaw! your sweet name, Germaine, in the dedication, will bring us luck. Left two copies on Rue de Beaune, at the Astiers', who, as you know, no longer have their apartment at the Foreign Office; but Madame Astier has kept her reception day. On Wednesday then I shall know what the master thinks of my work; and off I go to the Institute, where I find another factory in full blast.

Really, the activity in Paris is something prodigious, especially to those who, like us, live the year round in the free and tranquil atmosphere of the fields. Found Picheral — you remember him, the polite gentleman in the secretary's office, who gave you such a good seat three years ago, at the meeting when I won my prize — Picheral and his clerks, in a hurly-burly of names and addresses tossed from one desk to another among stacks of blue, yellow, and green tickets, for galleries,

boxes, hemicycle, aisle A, aisle B, issuing invitations to the great annual session which an itinerant Royal Highness, the Grand Duke Leopold, will honor with his presence. "Extremely sorry, Monsieur le Vicomte"—Picheral always addresses me so, a tradition of Chateaubriand, I suppose—"but you will have to wait."

"At your convenience, Monsieur Picheral."

The good man is very amusing and very polite—he makes me think of Bonicar, of our lessons in deportment in the covered gallery at Grandma de Jallanges' — and irritable too, like an old dancing-master, when anyone thwarts him. I should have liked you to hear him talk to the Comte de Brétigny, an ex-minister, one of the great men in the Academy, who came while I was waiting, on a matter of fees for attendance at meetings. You see, the *jeton de présence*[1] is worth six francs, the old-fashioned crown of six livres; there are forty academicians, which makes two hundred and forty francs per meeting, to be divided among those who are present, so that the smaller the number, the larger the share. The members are paid every month in the old crowns, in coarse paper bags, on each of which the account is pinned like a laundress's bill. Brétigny's account was wrong, it lacked two *jetons*, and it was the most amusing thing imaginable to see that richest of rich men, president of heaven knows how many

[1] A piece of metal, usually flat and round, given, in many societies, to each member present at meetings; hence, by extension, the honorarium allowed for attendance.

boards of directors, coming in his gorgeous carriage to demand his twelve francs. He got only six, which Picheral, after a long discussion, tossed to him loftily, as to a messenger, and which the Immortal pocketed with unbounded satisfaction. It is so sweet, the money earned by the sweat of one's brow! For you must not think that there is any idling at the Academy; all the legacies and new foundations, whose number increases from year to year, so many works to read, reports to engross, and the Dictionary, and the addresses! — "Leave your book at their doors, but don't show yourself," Picheral said to me when I told him that I was a competitor for the prize. "All this enforced labor that the competition imposes on them makes our gentlemen rather savage to applicants."

Indeed, I remember the greeting of Ripault-Babin and Laniboire at the time of my last prize. But when the competitor is a pretty woman, it 's quite another story. Laniboire waxes merry, and Ripault-Babin, still effervescent, although past eighty, offers the candidate a little marsh-mallow paste, and bleats: "Put it to your lips first. I will finish it." I picked up that story in the secretary's office, where the Immortals are discussed with good-humored freedom. "The Boisseau prize? Let me see — you have two dukes, three *Petdeloups*, two *cabotins* on the committee." That is the way the Académie Française is subdivided in the private conversation of the offices. The *dukes* include all nobles and

bishops; the *Petdeloups* are the professors and *savants* of all varieties, and by *cabotins* are meant lawyers, dramatists, journalists, and novelists.

Furnished with the addresses of my Petdeloups, dukes, and *cabotins*, I bestowed one of my copies on the amiable Picheral, and left another, as a matter of form, for poor M. Loisillon, the perpetual secretary, who is said to be at death's door, and made haste to distribute the others throughout the length and breadth of Paris. The weather was superb, the Bois de Boulogne, through which I drove on returning from Ripault-Babin's, — "put it to your lips first," — was fragrant with the hawthorn and the violet, and I fancied myself at home in the first days of an early spring, when the air is so cool and the sun so hot; I was seized with a longing to drop everything and return to Jallanges, to you. Dined on the boulevard, all alone, dismally enough; ended the evening at the Français, where I saw Desminières' *Le Dernier Frontin.* This Desminières is one of my judges for the Boisseau prize, so I will not tell you how his lines bored me. Between the heat and the gas my head was on fire. All the actors acted as if for the great king himself; and while they spouted Alexandrines as if they were removing bandages from a mummy, the odor of the Jallanges hawthorn still haunted me, and I repeated to myself the charming verses of Du Bellay, who is almost of our province: —

Plus que le marbre dur me plait l'ardoise fine,
Plus mon Loire gaulois que le Tibre latin,
Plus mon petit Liré que le mont Palatine,
Et plus que l'air marin la douceur angevine.[1]

Tuesday.— All the morning running about Paris, and standing in front of publishing houses looking for my book in the windows. *La Faunesse — La Faunesse.* You see nothing but that everywhere, with the label "Just out;" and at long intervals a poor, pitiful *God in Nature*, almost out of sight. When nobody was looking at me I would put it on top of the pile, in plain sight, but nobody stopped. Yes, on Boulevard des Italiens, a very good-looking negro, with an intelligent face, turned the leaves of my book for five minutes, then went away without buying. I was strongly inclined to present it to him.

Breakfasted in an out-of-the-way English tavern, and read the newspapers.

Not a word about me, not even a little advertisement. That Manivet is so negligent! I wonder if he has sent copies to the newspapers, as he solemnly swears that he has? And then so many books are always being published! Paris is submerged with them. It is depressing all the same when you find the verses that fairly burned your fingers, that you wrote so joyfully, in a fever

[1] Dearer to me the soft slate than the marble hard,
Dearer my Gallic Loire than Latin Tiber
Dearer my little Liré than Mount Palatine,
Dearer Anjou's soft breezes than the sharp sea air.

of composition, and that seemed to you so fine, so well calculated to fill and illumine the world, when you find them in circulation, but less known than when they were humming obscurely in your brain; it is a little like the story of a ball-dress, donned amid the enthusiasm of the family, in which you imagine that you are destined to eclipse and surpass everybody, but which in the glare of the chandeliers is lost in the crush.

Ah! that Herscher is a lucky fellow! He is read; he is understood. I met numbers of women with that new yellow volume under their arms or in their cloaks. More 's the pity! to no purpose does a man place himself above and outside of the common herd; it is for the common herd that he writes. Would Robinson Crusoe, separated from the whole world, alone in his island, bereft of everything, even of the hope of spying a sail on the horizon — would he, even if he had had a great poetic genius, ever have written poetry? I mused at length on that subject as I strolled on the Champs-Élysées, lost like my book in that vast, indifferent multitude.

I was returning to dine at my hotel, in no very cheerful humor, as you can imagine, when, in front of the verdure-clad ruin of the Cour des Comptes, on Quai d'Orsay, I collided with a tall, absent-minded devil who was occupying the whole sidewalk.

"Freydet!"

"Védrine!"

You cannot have forgotten my friend Védrine,

the sculptor, who passed an afternoon at Clos-Jallanges, with his charming young wife, while he was at work at Mousseaux. He has not changed, only a little grizzled around the temples. He was leading by the hand that lovely boy with the feverish eyes whom you admired so, and was walking along with his head in the air, with calm, descriptive gestures and the soaring, superb bearing of a promenade in Elysium, followed at a short distance by Madame Védrine, pushing a little carriage in which sat a bright, laughing little girl, born since their stay in Touraine.

"That makes three for her to look after, including me," said Védrine, pointing to his wife; and it is perfectly true that in the glance with which she encompassed her husband, there was the placid and affectionate motherliness of a Flemish Madonna kneeling in ecstasy before her son and her God. — Talked a long while, leaning against the parapet of the quay; it did me good to be with those excellent people. Védrine 's a man who snaps his fingers at success, and the public, and Academy prizes. With his family connections — he is a cousin of the Loisillons and Baron Huchenard — he would have only to express a wish, to dilute his over-strong wine with a little water, and he could obtain plenty of orders, win the biennial prize, and be a member of the Institute to-morrow. But nothing tempts him, not even glory. — "I have tasted glory two or three times," he said to me, "and I know what it is. I 'll tell you : sometimes in smoking you have

accidentally turned your cigar around? well! there's your glory. A good cigar with the lighted end, the fire and ashes, in your mouth."

"But, Védrine, if you work neither for glory nor for money —"

"Oh! as to that —"

"Yes, I know your noble contempt of money. But, in that case, why take so much trouble?"

"For myself, for my individual enjoyment, the longing to create, to give expression to my thoughts."

Evidently he would have continued his toil, even on the desert island. He is the typical artist, restless, eager for new forms, and, in his intervals of work, seeking to satisfy his taste for the unpublished with other materials, other elements. He has made pottery, enamels, the beautiful mosaics in the Salle des Gardes at Mousseaux, which are so admired. Then when the thing is done, the difficulty overcome, he goes on to something else; his dream at this moment is to try painting, and as soon as his paladin is finished — a huge bronze figure for the Rosen tomb — he intends, as he says, to "try his hand at oils." And his wife always approves, bestrides all his chimeras with him; the true artist's wife, silent, admiring, turning aside from the great child whatever might mar the beauty of his dream, or cause his foot to stumble in his astrologer's progress. A woman, my dear Germaine, to make one long for marriage. Yes, if I knew such another, I would bring her to Clos-Jallanges, and

I am sure that you would love her; but don't be alarmed, the Madame Védrines are few and far between, and we will continue to live by ourselves, as now, until the end.

When we parted, we made an appointment for next Thursday, not at their home at Neuilly, but at the studio on Quai d'Orsay, where they all pass the day together. This studio, it seems, is the most extraordinary place in the world; a corner of the old Cour des Comptes, where the sculptor has obtained permission to work amid the wild plants and the crumbling stones. As I left them, I turned to watch them walking along the quay, father, mother, and little ones, clustered in the peaceful beams of the setting sun, which threw a golden halo about them like a picture of the Holy Family. Made a rough outline of some verses thereupon this evening at the hotel; but the neighbors annoy me, I dare not give tongue. I need my large study at Jallanges, my three windows looking on the river and the vine-covered hillsides.

Here is Wednesday at last, the great day, with its great news, which I mean to tell you in detail. I confess that I awaited the time for my call upon the Astiers with a fluttering sensation at my heart, which was accentuated to-day when I ascended that damp but majestic old staircase on Rue de Beaune. What would they say to me about my book? Would my old master, Astier, have found time to open it? It was a matter of

such great moment to me, the opinion of that excellent man, who has always retained in my eyes his prestige as a professor in his chair, and in whose presence I shall always feel like a school-boy. His impartial, mature opinion would certainly be that of the Academy in the matter of the Boisseau prize. Imagine, then, my agonized impatience while I waited in the great study which the master abandons to his wife for her weekly reception.

Ah! it is a very different place from the apartment at the Foreign Office. The historian's table is pushed into a corner, masked by a huge screen covered with some venerable material, which also conceals a part of the library. Opposite, in the place of honor, is the portrait of Madame Astier in her younger days, bearing an extraordinary likeness to her son, also to old Réhu, whom I have had the honor to know for a few hours. The portrait, though it does not lack distinction, looks a little melancholy and cold and waxen, like the great uncarpeted room, with gloomy curtains hanging at windows that look on a still gloomier courtyard. But Madame Astier appeared, and her warm welcome transformed everything in my neighborhood. What is there in the air of Paris that preserves the charm of a woman's face long beyond her time, like the glass over a picture? That slender, sharp-eyed, fair-haired creature seemed to me three years younger. She talked at first about you and your dear health, expressing deep interest in our frater-

nal household; then she said eagerly: "And your book? let us talk about your book! What a wonderfully beautiful thing! I read you all night." And she said a thousand pleasant things, quoted several lines with perfect accuracy, and assured me that my master, Astier, was enchanted with the book; he had told her to tell me so, in case he should be unable to leave his work.

I am red enough ordinarily, so that my face must have been fairly purple, as at the close of a hunt dinner; but my joy soon fled, as a result of the confidential disclosures which the poor woman was led to make to me concerning their straitened circumstances. Considerable losses, their dismissal from office, the master working night and day at his historical books, which are so slow and so costly, and which the public do not buy. And then the grandfather, old Réhu, who must be assisted, for he has almost nothing outside of his fees for attendance; and at his age, ninety-eight years, they have to be so careful of him and humor him so! Of course Paul is a good son, a worker, in a fair way to succeed; but these first years of a professional career are terrible. So Madame Astier conceals their destitute plight from him, as well as from her husband, poor, dear, great man, whose heavy, even step I could hear over my head, while his wife asked me with trembling lips, hesitating for words and tearing them out at last, if I could not — Oh! divine, divine creature, I would have liked to kiss the lace of her dress! — And now you understand,

dearest sister, the despatch you have just received, and for whom the ten thousand francs are intended which I asked you to send by return mail. I assume that you sent at once to Gobineau. I would have notified him directly, except that you and I "go halves" in everything, and must share our generous and compassionate impulses like all the rest. But, my love, what a shocking thing it is that these magnificent, illustrious Parisian house-fronts conceal so many sorrows!

Five minutes after these heart-rending avowals, when people had begun to arrive and the salons were full, Madame Astier talked and answered questions with a perfect self-assurance and a cheerful voice and manner that made my blood run cold. I saw there Madame Loisillon, the wife of the perpetual secretary, who would do much better to stay at home and take care of her invalid than bore society to death with the charms of her delightful apartment, the most comfortable in the Institute, three more rooms than in Villemain's time. She repeated that at least ten times, in the gruff, uncivil voice of an auctioneer, and before a friend living in cramped quarters on the site of a former table d'hôte!

With Madame Ancelin, a name often cited in society journals, there was nothing of the sort to be feared. That excellent, rotund person, with a chubby red face, who whistles her bright remarks, or rather those that she picks up and hawks about, is the most amiable creature you can imagine. She 's another one who passed her

night reading me. After that, I was inclined to think it a mere formula. She threw her salon wide open to me, one of the three to which the Academy resorts to flap its wings. Picheral would say that Madame Ancelin, who dotes on the stage, prefers to receive the *cabotins*, Madame Astier the *Petdeloups*, and that the Duchesse Padovani monopolizes the dukes, the gentry of the Institute. But after all, these three rendezvous of renown and intrigue open into one another, for I saw on Rue de Beaune on Wednesday a varied assortment of Immortals of all categories: Danjou, the dramatic author, Rousse, Boissier, Dumas, de Brétigny, Baron Huchenard of the Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, Prince d'Athis of the Moral and Political Sciences. There is also a fourth salon in process of formation, — Madame Eviza's, a Jewess with full cheeks and long, narrow eyes, who flirts with the whole Institute, whose colors she wears, green embroidery on her spring jacket, and a little hat with the wings of a caduceus. Oh! such a flirt! a little beyond bounds. I heard her say to Danjou when she invited him to her receptions: "At Madame Ancelin's the motto is: 'Here we dine.' At my house it is: 'Here we love.'"

"I require both, board and lodging," replied Danjou, coldly — a man whom I believe to be a perfect cynic under his stern, passionless mask, his thick, black fleece like a Latin shepherd's. A fluent talker, Madame Eviza, of imperturbable erudition, quoting at old Baron Huchenard whole

sentences from his "Cave-Dwellers," and discussing the poet Shelley with a callow critic for one of the reviews, a duly wise and solemn youngster, with a high collar under his pointed chin.

In my young days it was the fashion to begin with poetry, no matter what one's goal might be — prose, business, or the bar. Now one must begin with criticism, and as a general rule with a study on Shelley. Madame Astier presented me to this little gentleman, whose judgments carry weight in the literary world, but my moustache and my sunburned face, like a soldier's or ploughman's, apparently did not take his fancy, for we exchanged only a few words while I was watching the comedy of the candidates and the wives or relations of candidates for the Academy, who came just to keep themselves in view, to feel the ground; for Ripault-Babin is very old and Loisillon cannot last; two empty chairs in prospect, around which fierce glances and poisoned words are exchanged.

Dalzon — your favorite novelist, you know — was there; a pleasant, frank, clever face, exactly suited to his talent. But it would have pained you to see him fluttering humbly about an empty creature like Brétigny, who has never done anything, and who occupies in the Academy the seat reserved for the man of the world, which may be compared to that of the "poor man" at the Twelfth Night feasts in the provinces; and not only about Brétigny, but about every academician who appeared, listening attentively to old Réhu's anecdotes, laughing at every malicious sally of

Danjou's, with the forced, school-boy laugh, which Védrine in the old days at Louis-le-Grand used to call the "laugh for the professor." And all that for the purpose of obtaining enough votes in addition to the twelve he had last year to give him the necessary majority.

Old Jean Réhu appeared for a moment, marvellously hale and erect, tightly buttoned in his long frock-coat, with a tiny little face, all shrivelled as if it had fallen into the fire, and a short, woolly beard, a patch of moss on an old stone. He has sharp eyes and a wonderful memory; but he is deaf, which fact depresses him, condemns him to monologues full of interesting personal reminiscences. He described to us to-day the private life of the Empress Josephine at Malmaison; his countrywoman he calls her, for they were both Creoles from Martinique. He showed her to us in her muslins and her shawls, smelling of musk to knock you down, surrounded with flowers from the colonies, which the enemy's ships gallantly allowed to pass their lines, even in time of war. He also talked about David's studio during the Consulate, and described the painter, with his puffed-out cheeks, always full of pulp, addressing his pupils in the most familiar way and abusing them roundly. And invariably, at the end of every anecdote the patriarch who has seen so many things shakes his head, gazes into vacancy, and says in his loud voice, "I saw that," placing a seal of authenticity, so to speak, at the foot of the picture.

I must say that, aside from Dalzon, who hypocritically drank in his words, I was the only one in the salon who displayed any interest in the old fellow's anecdotes, which were much more interesting to me than the gossip of a certain Lavaux, newspaper man, librarian, I don't know exactly what, but at all events terribly talkative and knowing. As soon as he arrived, "Ah! here 's Lavaux! — Lavaux!" — and a circle was instantly formed around him with much laughter and merriment; the most solemn of the Immortals relishes the anecdotes of this vulgar creature, a sort of methodistical canon, with a closely shaven, rubicund face, and eyes like billiard-balls, who constantly intersperses his scandalous stories and harangues with: "I said to de Broglie," — "Dumas told me the other evening," — "I have this from the duchess," — making free with the greatest names, celebrities of all sorts, petted by all the ladies, whom he keeps posted in academic, diplomatic, literary, and social intrigues, an intimate friend of Danjou, who thee-and-thous him, and a satellite of Prince d'Athis with whom he came; he treats Dalzon with lofty superiority, also the young critic of Shelley; in short, he possesses a power, an influence which I cannot understand.

In the medley of anecdotes which he produced from his inexhaustible sack, mostly riddles to my provincial innocence, only one made an impression upon me: the adventure of a young *garde-noble*, Count Adriani, who, it seems, while passing

through Paris with his ablegate, to carry to somebody or other a cardinal's red cap and hood, left those two insignia in the apartments of a night-walker whom he met in the station the moment he left the train, and of whose name and address the poor fellow, knowing nothing of Paris, was entirely ignorant. So he was obliged to write to the court of Rome to replace the two articles of priestly gear, the possession of which must have sorely embarrassed the damsel. The amusing feature of the incident is that Count Adriani is the nuncio's own nephew, and that at the duchess's last evening reception — they speak of "the duchess" here just as at Mousseaux — he told his story in all innocence and in a delightful jargon which Lavaux mimics to admiration. "In ze station, Monsignor he say to me: 'Peppino, take ze *berretto*. — I already have ze *zucchetto* — with ze *berretto*, zat make two.'" And the youthful and ardent churchman's rolling eyes when he halted in front of the hussy: "Cristo! how beautiful she is!"

Amid the laughter and the little exclamations, "Charming!" "Oh! that Lavaux — that Lavaux!" I asked Madame Ancelin, who was sitting near me: "Who is this Monsieur Lavaux? What has he done?"

The good woman seemed paralyzed with amazement. — "Lavaux? You don't know? Why, he's the duchess's zebra!" With that she was off, running after Danjou, and left me amply informed. This Parisian society is most extraor-

dinary, its dictionary is rewritten every season. Zebra, a zebra! What can that mean? But I saw that I was prolonging my visit beyond all decency, and my master Astier did not appear. It was time for me to go. I picked my way between the chairs to pay my respects to the mistress of the house; on the way I was spied by Mademoiselle Moser, who was weeping on Brétigny's white waistcoat. As his candidacy has been pending ten years, poor Moser is discouraged and no longer dares solicit votes himself, but sends his daughter, a maiden already past her prime and not pretty, who suffers like Antigone, climbs stairs, acts as messenger and drudge for academicians and their wives, corrects proofs, nurses the rheumatism of one and another, wears away her melancholy celibacy in this pursuit of the chair which her father will never reach; in black, of modest mien, her hair dressed in wretched taste, she blocked the exit not far from Dalzon, who, intensely excited, was arguing with two academicians with judicial heads, and protesting in a choking voice, —

"It 's not true — an infamous lie! I never wrote it!"

Mystery! Madame Astier, who might enlighten me, is deep in a very confidential conference with Lavaux and Prince d'Athis.

You must have seen this Prince d'Athis, Samy as he is called, driving about Mousseaux with the duchess, — a tall, thin, bald creature, bent double, with a jaded face as white as wax, a black beard

that reaches half-way to his knees, as if all the hair that was lacking on his head had fallen into the beard; a man who never speaks, and who, when he looks at you, seems scandalized that you should dare to breathe the same air that he breathes. As a minister plenipotentiary, reserved and subtle, of the Britannic species — he is Lord Palmerston's grand-nephew — he is quoted at a very high figure at the Institute and on Quai d'Orsay. He is, it seems, the only one of our diplomatists whom Bismarck has never ventured to look in the face. They say he is on the point of being named to fill one of our great embassies. What will become of the duchess? Will she go with him, leave Paris? it 's a very serious matter for that worldly creature. And then, in another country, will people accept this equivocal liaison, which is recognized here and held as sacred as a marriage, thanks to the dignified behavior of the parties, the careful observance of the proprieties, and the melancholy state of the duke, a paralytic, who is twenty years older than his wife, and is her uncle besides.

Doubtless the prince was discussing these grave matters with Lavaux and Madame Astier when I approached them. When one is a new-comer in any social circle whatsoever, he soon discovers of how little importance he is, knowing nothing of matters of current interest, words or ideas, in short, a nuisance. I was going away when dear Madame Astier called me back. — "Go up and see him; he will be so pleased!" — And I went

up to my old master by a narrow staircase. In the corridor I heard his firm voice, —

"Is that you, Fage?"

"No, my dear master."

"Why, Freydet! Look out, bend your head!"

It was actually impossible to stand upright in that loft; and what a contrast to the archives at the ministry where I last saw him, in that lofty gallery lined with boxes.

"A kennel, is n't it?" said the excellent man, with a smile; "but if you knew what treasures I have here!" And he waved his hand toward a great case containing at least ten thousand autographic documents of the greatest rarity, collected by him during these last years. — "There 's some history there," he said again and again, with much excitement, waving his magnifying-glass; "and new and reliable history too, whatever they may say!"

In reality he seemed to me depressed and nervous. He has been so badly treated. That brutal dismissal from office, and then, as he continued to publish historical works founded largely on documents, he was actually accused of cataloguing papers in the Bourbon archives. What was the source of that calumny? The Institute itself, this Baron Huchenard, who styles himself the prince of French autographiles and whom the Astier collection makes green with envy. Hence a savage, hypocritical warfare, a constant succession of perfidious, underhand attacks. — "Even my Charles the Fifths — they deny the authen-

ticity of my Charles the Fifths now! — And on what ground, do you suppose? For a slip of the pen, the merest trifle: *Maître* Rabelais instead of *Frère* Rabelais! as if an emperor's pen never stumbled. Bad faith! bad faith!" And seeing that I was indignant in sympathy with him, my dear master took my hands. — "Enough of their wretched tricks. — Madame Astier told you, didn't she, about your book? There is still a little too much for my taste — but no matter! I am well pleased." — The thing of which there is too much in my verses is what he calls *weeds*, imagination, fancy; long ago, at the lyceum, he always made war on us on that subject, cutting down and cutting out. And now, listen to this, my own Germaine; this is the end of our interview, word for word.

I. — Do you think, dear master, that I have any chance for the Boisseau prize?

THE MASTER. — After this book, my dear child, a chair, not a prize, is what you must have. Loisillon is near his end, Ripault-Babin will not last long. Don't you stir, but let me manage it. So far as I am concerned, your candidacy is a settled thing.

What did I say or reply? I have no idea. My blissful confusion was such that I seem to be dreaming still. I, I, a member of the Académie Française! Oh! be careful of yourself, dearest sister, and cure your poor legs, so that you can come to Paris for the great day, to see your brother with the sword at his side, in the

green coat embroidered with palm-leaves, take his place among all the most illustrious men in France. Ah! my head is in a whirl; I kiss you hastily and am off to bed.

Your dearly loving brother,

ABEL DE FREYDET.

As you can imagine, in the midst of all these adventures, I have forgotten seeds, mats, shrubs, all my errands; they shall soon be attended to; I shall remain here some time. Astier-Réhu advised me not to say a word, but to frequent academic circles. To show myself, let people see me, is more important than anything.

IV.

"BE on your guard, my dear Freydet. I know that game; it's the kidnapping game. In their hearts those fellows know that their time has come, that they are in a fair way to mould under their dome. The Academy is a taste that is dying out, an ambition that has gone out of fashion. Its success is only apparent. So that for some years past the illustrious company has ceased to wait at home for clients, but goes out on the sidewalk and lies in wait for them. In society, in the studios, bookshops, theatre corridors, in all artistic and literary places of resort, everywhere, in short, you will find the kidnapping academician smiling upon young and budding talents: 'The Academy has its eye on you, young man!' — If he is already known to fame, if the author has already reached his third or fourth book, as you have, the invitation is more direct: 'Think about joining us, my dear fellow; now is the time.' — Or else, bluntly, in an outburst of affection: 'Oh! it's quite clear that you don't wish to be one of us!' — The same trick is played, but more insinuatingly, with a larger dose of honey, on the man of the world, the translator of Ariosto, the writer of society comedies: 'Ha! ha! by the way — do you know that —' And if

the worldling exclaims about his unworthiness, the trifling importance of his person and his luggage, the kidnapper discharges at him the consecrated phrase: 'The Academy is a salon.' — *Bon sang de Dieu!* what purposes that sentence has served! 'The Academy is a salon; it receives not the work only, but the man.' — Meanwhile the kidnapper is petted and invited everywhere, to all the dinners, all the *fêtes*. He becomes the beflattered hanger-on of the hopes which he has planted and which he is careful to cultivate."

At that point honest Freydet waxed wroth. His master Astier would never stoop to such base expedients. But Védrine shrugged his shoulders as he rejoined, —

"He! why, he's the worst of all, the sincere, disinterested kidnapper. He really believes in the Academy; his whole life centres there, and when he says to you, 'If you knew how pleasant it is!' with the smack of the lips with which one enjoys a ripe peach, he speaks as he thinks, and his bait is the more enticing and dangerous. But when the hook is once swallowed and has taken a firm hold, the Academy pays no further attention to its victim, but lets him struggle and flounder about. You're a fisherman; what do you call it when you have caught a fine perch or a heavy pike and drag it behind your boat?"

"Drowning the fish?"

"Exactly! Look at Moser! Has n't he a head precisely like a drowned fish's? — ten years they have had him in tow! And de Salède, and

Guerineau — and how many others who no longer even struggle."

"But after all, men do get into the Academy, do succeed in —"

"Never by towing behind. — And then, when one does succeed, what a glorious thing it is! — What does it bring in? — Money? not so much as your hay crop. — Notoriety? Yes, in a circle about as big as your hat. — Even so, it would be well enough if it produced talent, if those who have talent did not lose it when they are once admitted, congealed by the atmosphere of the place. The Academy is a salon, you understand; there is a certain style you must adopt, things that must not be said or must be toned down. Farewell to noble conceits; farewell to audacious strokes of the sort that break one's bones. The most active never stir again, for fear of marring the green coat; they are like children dressed in their Sunday best: 'Have a good time, but don't get dirty.' — They have a good time, I promise you. They still enjoy, I know, the adulation of the academic salons and of the fair dames who hold them. But they are so deathly tiresome! I speak from experience, having sometimes allowed myself to be drawn into them. Yes, as old Réhu says, I have seen it! Pretentious dolts have spouted at me ill-digested sentences from reviews, which issued from their mouths in little streamers such as are used to enclose the remarks of the persons in an illustrated rebus. I have heard Madame Ancelin, the good old soul that she is,

and as undiscriminating as chance, cluck with admiration over Danjou's witty remarks, stagy remarks, whittled with a knife, and as far from natural as the curls of his wig."

Freydet was struck dumb: Danjou, the Latin shepherd, wear a wig!

"Only half a one, a *breton*. — At Madame Astier's I have been subjected to ethnographical lectures warranted to kill a hippopotamus, and at the duchess's table, haughty and prudish though she be, I have seen that grinning old ape of a Laniboire in the place of honor, emitting obscenities which, from any other than an Immortal, would have caused him to be shown the door with a characteristic remark à la Padovani — I need say no more than that. — The comical part of it is that the duchess, who procured this Laniboire's admission to the Academy, after she had had him fawning at her feet, a pitiful object, whining and begging to be chosen, said to my cousin Loisillon: 'Elect him, elect him, to rid me of him.' — And now she honors him as a god and always has him near her at her table, her former contempt being replaced by the most servile admiration; thus the savage kneels and trembles before the idol he has himself carved. As if I didn't know all about the academic salons, all idiocy, absurdity, contemptible, petty intrigues! — And you propose to involve yourself in them? — I wonder why. You lead the most beautiful life imaginable. Even I, who desire nothing, almost envied you when I saw you at Clos-

Jallanges with your sister; the ideal house on a hillside, high ceilings, fireplaces in which you can stand erect, oaks, fields of grain, vineyards, the river, a country gentleman's existence such as we read of in Tolstoi's novels, fishing and hunting, good books, neighbors not insufferably stupid, gardeners not too much given to thieving, and, to keep you from growing torpid in that uninterrupted well-being, the smile of your invalid, that refined creature so full of life in her easy-chair, so happy when, on returning from an outing in the open air, you read her some beautiful sonnet, lines in praise of nature, straight from the heart, written in pencil on the pommel of your saddle, or lying on your stomach in the grass, as we are now, without this horrible uproar of drays and bugles."

Védrine was forced to stop. Heavy drays, laden with old iron, shaking the earth and the houses, a blare of trumpets in the neighboring dragoons' barracks, the hoarse bellow of a tow-boat whistle, an organ, the bells of Sainte-Clotilde, united in one of those bewildering *tutti* which the various noises of a great city sometimes form; and the contrast was most impressive between that immense, Babylonian tumult which one felt to be so near, and the field of wild oats and ferns, shaded by tall trees, where the two former schoolmates at Louis-le-Grand were smoking together and talking heart to heart.

It was at the corner of Quai d'Orsay and Rue de Bellechasse, on the ruined terrace of the

former Cour des Comptes, overgrown by fragrant wild grasses, like a quarry in the heart of the woods in early spring. Tall lilac bushes past their bloom, thick clumps of plane-trees and young maples, growing along stone balusters covered with ivy and clematis, formed a green, sheltered nook, where pigeons fluttered, where bees flew in and out, and in a ray of golden light could be seen the placid, beautiful profile of Madame Védrine nursing her little girl, while the boy hunted with stones a large flock of cats, gray, yellow, and black, which represented, as it were, the tigers of that jungle in the heart of Paris.

"And as we are on the subject of your verses, we will speak frankly, eh, old fellow? Now, your book, your new book, which I have only glanced through, has n't the pleasant fragrance of the lily of the valley and the wild mint which the others brought to me. It smells of the academic laurel, does your *God in Nature*, and I greatly fear that this time your attractive note à la Brigeux, all your woodland charm, have been sacrificed, tossed by way of toll into the jaws of Crocodilus."

That nickname Crocodilus, which Védrine found among his school-boy reminiscences, amused them for a moment. They seemed to see Astier-Réhu in his chair, with steaming brow, cap pushed back, an ell of red ribbon hanging on his black gown, accompanying with a solemn gesture of his long sleeves his stock jests, or his flowing periods

in the style of Vicq d'Azir, whose chair in the Academy he was to occupy later. Then as Freydet, feeling a twinge of remorse for having laughed thus at his old master, lauded his historical labors, and told of the innumerable archives he had overhauled and brought forth from the dust for the first time, —

"All that is nothing at all," said Védrine, with utter disdain. To him, the most interesting archives in an imbecile's hands had no more meaning than the famous human document when the novelist who undertakes to use it is an idiot. The gold piece changed into a dead leaf. — And he added, warming to the subject: "Tell me if that constitutes a claim to the title of historian, that piling up of unpublished documents in heavy octavos which no one reads, which figure in libraries on the shelf of instructive books, books for external use — to be well shaken before taken! — Only French levity takes such compilations seriously. How the Germans and the English poke fun at us! — *Ineptissimus vir Astier-Réhu!* says Mommsen in one of his notes."

"It was your very self, heartless creature, who made the poor man read that note in the class."

"Ah! I was called monkey and rascal that day almost as much as on the day when I got tired of hearing him tell us again and again that the will was a lever, that one could accomplish anything with that lever, and called to him from my bench, mimicking his voice: 'And the wings, Monsieur Astier, how about the wings?"

Freydet laughed heartily, and abandoning the historian for the schoolman, tried to defend Astier-Réhu as a professor. But that roused Védrine again.

"Oh! yes, let us talk about the professor, a wretch whose life is passed in destroying, in uprooting in thousands of other lives, what he calls the weeds; that is to say, whatever is original and spontaneous, — those germs of life which a master ought before everything to foster and protect. How he did grub and dig and hoe, the old sloven! There were some who resisted the hoe and the spade, but the old fellow went at them anew with teeth and nails, until he succeeded in making us all as neat and smooth as a school bench. And look at the men who passed through his hands, aside from a few rebels like Herscher, who, in his hatred of the conventional, goes to the other extreme of extravagance and baseness, and like myself, who owe to that old fool my taste for the distorted, the outraged, my sculpture in bags of walnuts, as they say; all the others reduced to the level of brutes, shaven, emptied."

"Oho! and what about me?" exclaimed Freydet, in comical distress.

"Oh! nature has saved you thus far, but beware! if you fall again under the spell of Crocodilus. And to think that there are national schools to furnish us with pedagogues of that type; to think that there are salaries for such creatures, decorations for such creatures, even the Institute for such creatures!"

Lying at full length in the luxuriant grass, his head resting on his hand, waving a fern with which he kept off the sun, Védrine uttered these violent sentences in a mild tone, without moving a muscle of his expansive face like an Indian idol's, with puffy white cheeks, a face whose indolent, dreamy expression was enlivened by a pair of small, laughing eyes.

The other listened, alarmed in his ingrained habit of veneration: "But how can you make up your mind to be the son's friend, hating the father as you do?"

"I am no more the friend of one than of the other. This Paul Astier interests me, with his dandified, rakish self-assurance and his face like a pretty strumpet's. I would like to live long enough to see what will become of him."

"Ah! Monsieur de Freydet," said Madame Védrine, joining in the conversation from where she sat, "if you knew how he makes use of my husband! Why, the whole work of restoring Mousseaux, the new gallery on the river, the music pavilion, the chapel, Védrine did everything; and the Rosen tomb! He will be paid for nothing but the statuary, when the idea, the arrangement, down to the smallest detail, is his."

"Hush — hush!" said the artist, as unmoved as ever. *Pardieu!* As for Mousseaux, that fellow would never have been capable of finding out what a single cornice was like, under the layer of trash that so-called architects had deposited there for the past thirty years; but the

lovely countryside, the affable and by no means wearisome duchess, and friend Freydet, whom he discovered at Clos-Jallanges. — "And then, you see, I have too many ideas; they embarrass me, they consume me. It 's a real favor to relieve me of some of them. My brain resembles a railroad station at one of the great junctions, where locomotives are puffing on all the tracks, heading in all directions. Our young man has grasped that fact; he lacks new ideas, so he filches mine and places them at the service of his customers, knowing that I shall never claim them. — But as to my being his dupe! — Why, I see through him perfectly when he proposes to steal something from me — a jaunty air, indifferent eyes, and suddenly a little nervous twitch at the corner of the mouth. It is done — in the bag! He undoubtedly says to himself aside, 'What an ass this Védrine is!' He has no suspicion that I am watching him, that I enjoy him. — And now," said the sculptor, rising, "let me show you my paladin, then we will inspect the old barrack. It 's an interesting place, as you will see."

Leaving the terrace to enter the palace, they ascended a circular stoop of several steps, crossed a square hall, formerly the office of the secretary of the Conseil d'État, with neither floor nor ceiling, all the upper floors having fallen in, so that they could see the blue sky between the huge iron rafters, twisted by the heat, which divided the different floors. In a corner, against the wall, to which long cast-iron pipes were still clinging,

overgrown with climbing plants, a plaster model of the Rosen tomb lay in three pieces amid the nettles and rubbish.

"You see," said Védrine, "or no, you can't see" — and he described the monument to his friend. By no means easily satisfied was that little princess in the matter of her tumulary whims; divers attempts had been required, Egyptian, Assyrian, Ninevite types of sepulchral monuments, before they came to Védrine's scheme, which made the architects cry aloud, but did not lack grandeur. A military tomb, an open tent with the canvas sides raised, affording a view of the interior, where the broad, low sarcophagus, carved to resemble a camp bed, stood in front of an altar; and upon it the gallant crusader, who died for his king and his faith; beside him his broken sword, and at his feet a huge greyhound lying at full length.

Because of the difficulty of the task, the hardness of the Dalmatian granite, for which the princess expressly stipulated, Védrine had had to take the chisel and mallet, to work under the shed at Père-Lachaise, like a journeyman; at last, after much time and trouble, the piece was in place. "And that young coxcomb of a Paul Astier will derive much honor from it," added the sculptor, smiling without the slightest trace of bitterness; then he raised an old rug which covered a hole in the wall that had once been a door, and ushered Freydet into the spacious vestibule, — with a ceiling of boards covered with mats, and with

hangings on the ruined walls, — which he used as a studio. The general aspect of the place and its littered condition were those of a shed, or of a covered courtyard; for a superb fig-tree, with its distorted branches and decorative leaves, stood in a sunny corner and, close by, the wreck of an exploded stove simulated an old well, wreathed in ivy and honeysuckle. There he had been working for two years, summer and winter alike, in the fog from the river, the freezing, deadly north wind, "without so much as sneezing once," he declared, as placid and robust as one of those great artists of the Renaissance whose ample features and fertile imagination he possessed. Now he knew sculpture and architecture he said, as he might have said that he had written a tragedy. As soon as his figure was delivered and paid for, he proposed to start off and go up the Nile in a dahabiyeh with his flock, and paint, paint from morning till night. — As he spoke, he moved a stool and a box and led his friend to an enormous rough-wrought block.

"There 's my paladin — tell me frankly what you think of it."

Freydet was a little awed and bewildered by the colossal dimensions of the recumbent warrior, the figure being more than life-size, so that it should be proportioned to the height of the tent, and the defaced plaster exaggerating the effect of the strong treatment of the muscles, which gives to all the works of Védrine, who has a horror of labored effects, the incomplete, earthy, prehistoric

aspect of a noble work still in its native soil; as he looked longer and grasped it better, he detected in the enormous statue the irradiating, attractive power in which the beautiful in art consists.

"Superb!" he said, with evident sincerity. And the other, his eyes twinkling with kindly laughter, —

"Not at first sight, eh? One has to get accustomed to my sculpture, and I 'm afraid that the princess, when she sees this terrific fellow — "

Paul Astier was to bring her to him in a few days, when it was all planed down and polished, ready to be cast; and the prospect of that visit disturbed him, for he knew the tastes of society women; he had heard, on five-franc days at the Salon, the stereotyped chatter that goes the rounds of the galleries and makes merry over the statuary. How they lie, how they exert themselves to lie! There is nothing sincere about them except their spring costumes, made expressly for the Salon, which gives them an opportunity to show them.

"I tell you, old fellow," continued Védrine, as he led his friend out of the studio, "of all Parisian grimaces, of all society falsehood, there is none more insolent and more comical than this extravagant love for art. Such mummery makes me burst with laughter; they all profess it and not one of them believes it. It 's the same with music; if you could see them on Sunday — "

They were passing a long arched passageway, overgrown like all the rest with that curious

vegetation whose seeds, brought thither from the four corners of the sky, swelled and burst, made the trodden earth green, and protruded from between the paintings on the cracked and smoke-blackened walls; then they found themselves in the court of honor, formerly gravelled, but to-day a field of oats, plaintain, clover, and groundsel mingled in confusion, with their innumerable stalks and clusters, and in the midst a kitchen-garden marked off by boards and bright with helianthus, where strawberries and pumpkins were ripening in the sunlight — a squatter's little garden on the outskirts of some virgin forest — and, to complete the illusion, a small brick building stood beside it.

"The book-binder's garden and his shop," said Védrine, pointing to a sign in letters a foot long over the door: —

ALBIN FAGE.

BOOK-BINDING IN ALL STYLES.

This Fage, binder for the Cour des Comptes and the Conseil d'État, who had obtained permission to retain his quarters which were untouched by the fire, was the only tenant of the palace except the concierge.

"Let us go in a moment," said Védrine; "you will see an interesting type."— As they approached the house, he called: "Hallo! Père Fage!"— But the binder's modest workshop was deserted; there was only the table by the window laden with great shears, clippings, and green volumes with

metal corners under a press. The peculiar feature of the establishment was that the stitching-table, the trimming-table, the empty chair before it, the stands upon which books were piled, and even the shaving-mirror hanging on the window shutter, were all of miniature size and none too high for a child of twelve; one would have said it was the abode of a dwarf, a Lilliputian binder.

"He's a hunchback," Védrine whispered to Freydet, "and a hunchbacked lady's man, who uses perfumes and pomades."

There was a sickening smell of a barber's shop, essence of rose and Lubin's perfumes, mingled with the musty smell of glue, which choked one. Védrine called again, in the direction of the bedroom at the rear; then they went out, Freydet much amused by the idea of a hunchbacked Lovelace.

"Perhaps he is away on some love-affair."

"Are you joking? — Let me tell you, my dear fellow, this runt is the lover of the prettiest women in Paris, if we can believe the walls of his bedroom, which are papered with photographs signed and dedicated: 'To my Albin.' — 'To my dear little Fage.' — And no common drabs; actresses, the aristocracy of the demi-monde. He never brings them here; but from time to time, after a spree of two or three days, he comes to the studio all in a flutter, and tells me with his ghastly leer that he has made himself a present of a superb octavo, or a pretty little duodecimo, for he calls his conquests one or the other according to their size.

"And he is ugly, you say?"

"A monster."

"Without means?"

"A poor little book-binder and maker of pasteboard boxes, who lives on what he earns and his vegetables; intelligent, withal, tremendously erudite, and such a memory! — We shall find him, undoubtedly, prowling about in some corner of the palace. He's a great dreamer, this Père Fage, like all passionate men. Follow me, but mind where you step; the path isn't very smooth always."

They ascended a broad staircase, of which the lower steps still held, as did the stair rail, although it was thick with rust and broken and twisted in spots; then they took a precarious wooden bridge resting on the stair supports, beween high walls where one could detect the remains of great frescoes, cracked and eaten into and black as soot — the croupe of a horse, a woman's bust, with titles almost illegible on tarnished tablets: *Meditation — Silence — Commerce Bringing the Nations Together.*

On the first floor a long corridor with an arched ceiling, like the arenas at Arles and Nîmes, stretched away between black, cracked walls, lighted here and there by extensive breaches, exhibiting heaps of crumbling plaster, melted metal, and tangled vegetation. On the wall at the entrance to this corridor were the words: *Corridor des Huissiers.* They found this floor almost like the floor below; but here, the roof

having given way, there was simply a long terrace of wild plants climbing about the arches that had remained upright, and falling, a confused mass of swaying, rope-like branches, to the level of the court of honor. And they could see from there the roofs of the neighboring houses, the white walls of the barracks on Rue de Poitiers, the tall plane-trees of the Padovani palace, rocking in their topmost branches great numbers of rooks' nests, deserted and empty until winter; and at their feet the deserted courtyard, the binder's little garden, and his miniature cottage.

"I say, old fellow, look at that, look at that!" exclaimed Védrine, calling his friend's attention to the wild flora, to its extraordinary luxuriance and variety. "If Crocodilus should see this, how he would fume!" — Suddenly he drew back: "Well, upon my word, this is too much!"

Down by the binder's house Astier-Réhu came in sight, recognizable by his long, snake-green frock coat, his silk hat with the broad, flat rim — that hat set back over the grizzly curls, forming a halo for the archangel of the baccalaureate, was famous on the left bank. It was Crocodilus in person! He was talking earnestly with a little bare-headed man, glistening with cosmetics, dressed in a light, tight-fitting jacket which brought out the deformity of his back like a device of coquetry. They could not hear their words, but Astier seemed very much excited, brandishing his cane and leaning over the little man, whose face, on the contrary, was perfectly

calm and wore a reflective look; his two great hands were clasped under his hump.

"So that abortion works for the Institute, does he?" said Freydet, remembering at that moment that his master had called the name of Fage. Védrine did not reply, as he was watching intently the gestures of the two men, whose discussion came to an abrupt conclusion, the hunchback entering the house with a wave of the hand which said, "As you choose," while Astier-Réhu strode fiercely away toward the exit on Rue de Lille, then, after a moment's hesitation, returned to the shop, the door of which was closed upon him.

"It's very funny," muttered the sculptor. "Why did Fage never tell me? What a bottomless pit that little man is! Who knows, perhaps they take their amusement together, hunt in couples for duodecimos and octavos."

"Oh! Védrine!"

Freydet, his visit at an end, walked slowly along Quai d'Orsay, thinking about his book and his ambition Academyward, being seriously shaken by the harsh truths he had heard. How little people change, after all! How early a man becomes what he will always be! After twenty-five years, under the wrinkles, the gray hairs, all the exterior coatings which life lays upon men, the two old chums at Louis-Le-Grand found one another unchanged since they sat together on their class-room bench; one impulsive, enthusiastic, always in rebellion; the other docile,

devoted to the hierarchy, with a background of indolence which the tranquillity of a country life had developed. After all, perhaps Védrine was right; even if he were sure of succeeding, was it worth so much trouble? He was especially alarmed for his sister, the poor infirm creature, all alone at Clos-Jallanges, while he paid his visits and attended to all the other necessary duties of a candidate. Even an absence of a few days frightened and saddened her, and she had written him a heart-rending letter that morning.

At that moment he was passing the dragoons' barracks, and his attention was diverted by the sight of the hungry multitude waiting on the other side of the street for the distribution of the remains of the soup. They had come a long while too early, for fear of losing their turns, and were sitting on the benches or standing in line against the parapet of the quay, — dirty, filthy creatures, with the hair and beards of men-dogs, dressed in rags worthy of shipwrecked sailors; and there they remained, without moving or speaking, like a herd of cattle, watching the rear of the great military courtyard for the appearance of the kettles and the signal from the adjutant giving them leave to enter. It was a ghastly sight, in the glorious sunshine — that silent row of wild beasts' eyes, of famished mouths turned with the same brutelike expression toward that open gateway.

"What are you doing here, my dear child?"

Astier-Réhu, radiant of face, had passed his arm through his pupil's. He followed the poet's

hand as he pointed to that distressing Parisian picture on the opposite sidewalk. — "True — true." — But his great pedagogue's eyes had never learned to read except in books; he had no clear perception of the affairs of life, no interest in them. Just from his manner of carrying Freydet away, of saying to him, "Walk with me as far as the Institute," he could feel that the master disapproved of this loitering in the street, preferred that he should be more serious than that. And leaning gently on the arm of his favorite disciple, he told him of his joy, his transports of bliss, at the miraculous treasure he had found: a letter from Catherine the Great to Diderot on the subject of the Academy, and it came just as he was preparing his address to the Grand Duke! He proposed to read this marvel of marvels at the meeting, and perhaps present to his Highness, in the name of the Academy, his great-grandmother's autograph. Baron Huchenard would burst with malignant envy.

"By the way, about my Charles the Fifths. Calumny, pure calumny. I have here the means of putting that Zoïle to confusion!" With his short, fat hand he struck the morocco cover of a heavy satchel, and in the effusiveness of his joy, wishing that Freydet also should be happy, he recurred to their conversation of the day before, to his candidacy for the first vacant chair. It would be so charming, the master and the pupil seated side by side under the dome! — "And you will see how pleasant it is, how comfortable we

arè there; nobody can imagine what it is until he is there." — To hear him, it seemed that when one was once there, all the sadness and misery of life were at an end. They knocked at the door but could not enter. One soared very high, in peace and light, above envy and criticism, sanctified. Everything! one had everything; there was nothing left for one to desire. — Ah! the Academy, the Academy! its detractors talked about it without knowledge of their subject, or from jealous rage because they could not get in, the monkeys!

His loud voice rang out and made people turn and look all along the quay. Some recognized him, mentioned the name of Astier-Réhu. The publishers, the dealers in engravings and curiosities, accustomed to see him pass at regular hours, saluted him as they stood in the doorways of their shops, and respectfully stepped back.

"Freydet, look at that!" — The master pointed to the Palais Mazarin in front of which they had arrived. — "There it stands, my Institute; there it stands as it appeared to me in my earliest youth, in the crest on the cover of the Didot publications. Even then I said to myself, 'I will find my way in there' — and I have done so. It is your turn to make up your mind to it now, dear child. — Adieu!"

He walked briskly through the door at the left of the main building into a succession of spacious, majestic paved courtyards full of silence, where his shadow stalked beside him.

Even after he had disappeared, Freydet stood motionless, looking after him, hooked once more; and on his full, sunburned face, in his mild, round eyes there was the same expression as on the muzzles of the men-dogs waiting for their soup in front of the barracks. Thereafter, when he looked at the Institute, his face always assumed that expression.

V.

THERE is a state dinner this evening at the Padovani mansion, followed by a select reception. Grand Duke Leopold receives, at the table of his "perfect friend," as he calls the duchess, some members selected from the different sections of the Institute, and thus acknowledges the courteous welcome accorded him by the five Academies and the extravagant laudation of their director. As always in the salons of the former ambassadress, the diplomatic circle is favorably represented, but the Institute takes precedence of all else, and even the seating of the guests expresses the purpose of the dinner. The Grand Duke, seated opposite the mistress of the house, has Madame Astier at his right, at his left the Countess of Foder, wife of the first secretary to the Russian embassy, who is at present performing the functions of ambassador. The chair at the right of the duchess is occupied by M. Léonard Astier, that at her left by Mgr. Adriani, papal nuncio; then follow, in order, Baron Huchenard for the Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, Mourad-Bey the Turkish ambassador, the chemist Delpech for the Academy of Sciences, the Belgian minister, Landry the musician for the Academy of Fine Arts, Danjou the dramatic

author, one of Picheral's *cabotins*, and lastly, the Prince d'Athis, who, in his twofold capacity of minister plenipotentiary and member of the Academy of Moral and Political Science, well represents the complexion in two tints of the salon. At the end of the table, the general who acts as his Highness's aide-de-camp, the young *garde-noble* Count Adriani, the nuncio's nephew, and Lavaux, the indispensable, the regular guest at all festivities.

The female element is lacking in charm. The Countess of Foder, a lively, red-haired creature, very small and swathed in lace to the end of her little pointed nose, gives one the impression of a squirrel with a bad cold. Baronne Huchenard, of uncertain age, with a pronounced moustache, resembles a very fat old gentleman in a low-necked dress. Madame Astier, in a velvet dress, half-open at the neck, a gift from the duchess, sacrifices to her dear Antonia the joy it would afford her to show her arms and her shoulders, such attractions as she can still boast, and, thanks to that polite attention, the Duchesse Padovani seems the only woman at the table. Tall and fair, in her dress made by What's-His-Name, a very small face with lovely eyes tinged with gold, proud, mobile eyes, eyes of kindness, of affection, and of bitter wrath, under long black eyebrows that almost join; the short nose, the sensual, passionate mouth, and brilliant, youthful complexion, the complexion of a woman of thirty, which she owes to the habit of passing the after-

noon in bed when she receives or goes out in the evening. Having lived long abroad, as ambassadress at Vienna, St. Petersburg, Constantinople, and being entitled to set the pace for French fashions, she has retained a sort of opinionated, knowing manner, with which Parisian ladies find fault; for she talks to them condescendingly, as to foreigners, explains to them things that they know as well as herself. In her salon on Rue de Poitiers the duchess continues to represent Paris at the court of the Kurds, and that is the noble and radiant person's only fault.

Despite the almost total absence of women, of those light costumes displaying arms and shoulders, which form such a pleasing contrast to the monotony of black coats, and gleaming with jewels and flowers, the table is enlivened by the nuncio's violet cassock with a broad girdle of watered silk, Mourad-Bey's purple cap, the *garde-noble's* red tunic with gold collar and blue embroidery and gold lace on the breast, whereon glistens also the huge Cross of the Legion of Honor which the young Italian has received that very morning, the Elysée deeming itself in duty bound to reward him for the happy accomplishment of his mission as bearer of the *berretto*. Then, on all sides, there are the green, blue, and red patches of the decorations, the dull silver, and the flaming stars.

Ten o'clock. The dinner draws near its close, and not a flower is withered in the fragrant circles about the plates and epergnes; no loud voices, no

increased animation of gesture. And yet there is exquisite cheer at the Padovani palace, one of the few tables in Paris where real wine is still served. One has a feeling that there is some gourmand in the house; and not the duchess, —a typical French society woman, who always thinks the dinner good when she has on a dress that is becoming to her beauty, when the table is handsomely decorated and abundantly supplied with flowers, — but Madame's cavalier, Prince d'Athis, a refined palate, delicate stomach, cankered by club cooking, and unable to live without something more substantial than silver plate and the spectacle of state liveries with irreproachable white calves. It is on his account that careful attention to the menu is numbered among the fair Antonia's preoccupations; the highly seasoned dishes and the heady wines, which, to tell the truth, have hardly set the table ablaze this evening, are all for him.

The same torpor, the same stiff reserve prevails at dessert as at the first course; hardly a flush on the cheeks and noses of the women. A dinner of wax-dolls, formal and majestic, with that sort of majesty which is most easily managed with plenty of room for the scenery, lofty ceilings, and chairs set far apart, suppressing anything like shoulder to shoulder intimacy. A black, penetrating chill, as from a deep well, blows between the plates despite the warm June evening, whose breath, coming from the gardens through the half-closed blinds, gently bellies out the silk shades. The

guests talk to one another from above, at a distance, with the ends of the lips, with a fixed, wooden smile; and of all the things that are said, there is not one that is not a lie, that does not fall back upon the cloth, commonplace and trite, among the trifles of the dessert. Sentences wear masks like faces, and it is well that they do; for if every one should lay bare his mind at this moment, disclose his real thought, what confusion there would be in this illustrious assemblage!

The grand duke, whose large, sallow face is surrounded by mutton-chop whiskers, of too deep a black, a typical sovereign's face for the purposes of the illustrated papers, while he eagerly questions Baron Huchenard about his recent work, is inwardly thinking: "Great God! how this pedant bores me with his tree-shaped huts! How much better off I should be at the ballet of *Roxelane*, in which that little Déa dances, whom I adore! The author of *Roxelane* is here, so they say, but he's an ugly, depressing old fellow. Oh! for my little Déa's legs and her muslin skirts!"

The nuncio, with his long nose and thin lips, an intellectual Roman face with black eyes and a bilious complexion, also listens, with his head on one side, to the historical sketch of the human habitation, and thinks, as he glances at his nails, gleaming like shells: "I ate this morning at the nunciature a delicious *frittomisto*, which has not digested. Gioachimo fastened my girdle too tight. I wish I were safely away from the table."

The Turkish ambassador, thick-lipped, with a yellow, bestial face, his fez pulled over his eyes, says to himself as he fills Baronne Huchenard's glass: "These Christians are abominable villains to take their wives into society in such a state of decomposition; the stake, better the stake, than to let any one think that this vulgar creature ever shared my bed!"

And beneath the cajoling smile with which the baroness thanks his Excellency, there is this thought: "This Turk is a low fellow; he disgusts me."

Nor has what Madame Astier says aloud any closer connection with her engrossing thought: "If only Paul has not forgotten to go and fetch his great-grandpapa — it will be such a pretty sight to see the old man leaning on his great-grandson's arm. If we could only wheedle an order out of his Highness!" — Then, with an affectionate glance at the duchess: "She is looking her best to-night — good news, I suppose, concerning the embassy for her prince. Enjoy while you can, my girl; Samy will be married in a month."

Madame Astier is not mistaken. The grand duke, on his arrival, had informed his "perfect friend" that the Élysée had promised d'Athis the appointment; it was a matter of a few days. The duchess is wild with a restrained joy, which illumines her within, causes her to shine with extraordinary splendor. See what she has done for the man she loves, whither she has guided

him! And she is already planning her own establishment at St. Petersburg, — a fine mansion on the Prospect, not too far from the Embassy, — while the prince, pale-faced, with sunken cheek and wandering glance, — that glance whose scrutiny Bismarck cannot endure, — restraining upon his disdainful lip the twofold smile, diplomatic and academic, reflects: "Colette must make up her mind now; she could come to St. Petersburg, and we could be married quietly at the pages' chapel; it would all be over and past mending when the duchess heard of it."

Thus from guest to guest a thousand absurd, incongruous, inconsistent thoughts circulate, under the same viscous envelope. There is the blissful contentment of Léonard Astier, who has received that very morning the order of Stanislas, second class, in return for the presentation to his Highness of a copy of his address, bearing, pinned to the first page, the autograph of the great Catherine, very ingeniously enclosed in the complimentary welcoming passage. This letter, which carried off the honors of the meeting, has engrossed the attention of the newspapers for two days; all Europe is ringing with it, repeating the name of Astier, his collection, his work, with one of those disproportionate, deafening mountain echoes which the multiplicity of newspapers assures all contemporaneous events. Now let Baron Huchenard do his best to gnaw and bite, let him gurgle in his honeyed tone: "I call your attention, my dear confrère — " No one will listen to him any

more. And how well the prince of autographs realizes it; what a savage glance he turns upon his dear colleague between two sentences of his scientific rodomontade; what poison in all the hollows of his long, bevelled face, porous as pumice-stone!

The handsome Danjou is also in a rage, but for another reason than the baron's: the duchess has not invited his wife. This slight wounds him in his self-esteem as a husband, that other liver more sensitive than the real one; and notwithstanding his desire to shine in the grand duke's presence, the supply of witty remarks, almost new, which he has brought, remains unspoken in his throat. Another guest who smiles the wrong way is the chemist Delpech, whom his Highness, when the introductions were in progress, congratulated on his works on the cuneiform characters, confusing him with his confrère of the Academy of Inscriptions. It should be said that, with the exception of Danjou, whose plays are popular in other countries, the grand duke has never heard the names of the academic celebrities presented to him at this dinner. Lavaux and the aide-de-camp prepared that morning a series of little cards, each one bearing the name of a guest and a list of his principal works. That his Highness did not become more involved in his series of complimentary allusions proves his quick wit and his princely memory. But the evening is not at an end; other academic luminaries are to appear, and already the dull rumbling of carriages and

the slamming of doors are audible in the street. Monseigneur may be caught again.

Meanwhile, in a slow, indolent voice, hunting for his words, half of which pass out through his nose and are lost, his Highness discusses a historical point with Astier-Réhu, apropos of Catherine's letter. The finger-bowls have long since made the tour of the cloth, no one is eating or drinking; indeed they have all ceased to breathe for fear of interrupting the conference, the whole table being hypnotized, uplifted, and by a curious phenomenon of buoyancy literally hanging on the imperial lips. Suddenly the august talking through the nose ceases, and Léonard Astier, who has been arguing for form's sake, to make his adversary's triumph more complete, throws up his arms as if they were shattered weapons, saying with an air of conviction: "Ah! Monseigneur, you have made me look very foolish." The charm is broken, the whole table rises with a slight murmur of approbation, doors are thrown open, the duchess has taken the grand duke's arm, Mourad Bey offers his to the baroness; and while, with a rustling of skirts and a noise of chairs being pushed back, the party moves into the salons two by two, Firmin, the butler, with solemn face and chin in air, mutters aside: "This dinner anywhere else would have been worth a thousand francs bonus; but with her, damme! not even three hundred francs." — He adds, aloud, as if he spat the words on the haughty duchess's train, "Bah! you hussy!"

"With your Highness's permission, my grandfather, Monsieur Jean Réhu, dean of the five Academies."

Madame Astier's shrill pipe rings through the great, brightly lighted, almost empty salons, where the intimate friends invited for the evening have already assembled; she shouts very loud, so that grandpapa may understand to whom he is presented and make an appropriate reply. He bears himself proudly, does old Réhu; his tall figure is perfectly straight and he carries his little Creole head erect, the face black with age and covered with cracks. Leaning on the arm of Paul Astier, fashionably attired and charming, with his daughter on the other side and Astier-Réhu behind, the family group forms a sentimental scene à la Greuze, which one could readily imagine on one of the light tapestries which used to be hung on the walls of salons, and of which the old man was almost a contemporary. The grand duke, deeply moved, tries to think of some happy remark; but the author of the *Letters to Urania* does not figure on any of his cards. He extricates himself from the dilemma by a few vague sentences, to which old Réhu, assuming that he is questioning him about his age, as usual, replies: "Ninety-eight in a fortnight, your Highness." — Then he adds — nor is this more responsive to the grand duke's encouraging congratulations: "Not since 1803, Monseigneur; the city must be greatly changed."

And while this strange dialogue is in progress,

Paul whispers to his mother: "You can take him home, if you please; I 'll not take charge of him again. He 's as ugly as a wolf. All the way in the carriage he kept kicking me in the legs, to stretch his muscles, he said."

Young Paul's voice is extremely nervous and strained this evening, and there is a tense, drawn look upon his pleasant face which his mother knows well, which she noticed as soon as he came in. What is it now? She watches him, tries to read his light eyes, which are impenetrable, but more piercing and pitiless than ever.

And the chill of the dinner, the solemn chill continues, circulates among the guests grouped here and there, the few women sitting on low chairs in a circle, the men standing or walking about, making a pretence of earnest conversation, although visibly bent upon attracting his Highness's attention. It is for his benefit that Landry, the musician, stands dreaming by the mantel, raising his genial brow and his apostolic beard, and that, at the other corner, Delpech the chemist meditates, his chin in his hand, his head bent forward, in anxious thought, knitting his brows as if he were watching an explosive compound.

Laniboire, the philosopher, famous for his resemblance to Pascal, is prowling about, passing to and fro in front of the couch where his Highness is in the clutches of Jean Réhu; they have forgotten to present him, and his great nose stretches out piteously, begs at a distance, seems to say: "Tell me, pray, if this is not Pascal's

nose!" — And in the direction of the same couch Madame Eviza flashes between her half-closed lids a glance which promises everything, when, where and how Monseigneur pleases, if only Monseigneur will come to her house, if her guests may see him at her next Monday. Ah! no matter how much the scenery may change, the play will be always the same: vanity, degradation, readiness to cringe and crawl, the courtier-like need of humiliating, of debasing one's self! We may happen to be honored by an imperial visit; we have in the old lumber-room all that we need to receive it.

"General!"

"Your Highness?"

"I shall never arrive in time for the ballet."

"But why do we stay here, Monseigneur?"

"Some surprise — I don't know what; they are waiting until the nuncio has gone."

They muttered these few words with the ends of their lips, without looking at each other, without moving a muscle in their official faces, the aide-de-camp sitting near his master, whose nasal voice he imitates, and his rare gestures, his rigid position on the edge of the couch, one hand resting on his hip, as stiff as on parade or at the front of the imperial box at the Michaêl Theatre. Old Réhu, standing in front of them, will neither sit down nor cease to talk, to stir up his dust-covered centenarian's reminiscences. He has known so many people, dressed in so many different ways! and the farther away it is, the better he

remembers it. — "I saw that!" — He pauses a moment at the end of each anecdote, his eyes staring into vacancy, toward the fleeting past; then off he goes upon another. He was at Talma's, at Brunoy, or in Josephine's boudoir, filled with music-boxes, with gaudy humming-birds, buzzing and flapping their wings. And now he is breakfasting with Madame Tallien on Rue de Babylone. He describes her, nude to the hips, her lovely hips with the graceful sweep of a lyre, a long, cashmere *pagne* flapping against her buskined legs, her shoulders covered by long, curling locks. He had seen that, that plump, pale Spaniard's flesh, fattened with blanc mange; and the memory makes his little lashless eyes sparkle in their deep sockets.

Standing on the terrace, in the warm night air from the garden, some of the men are talking in undertones; stifled laughter may be heard in the shadow, where their cigars form a circle of red points. Lavaux is amusing himself by asking young Count Adriani for the story of the berretta and the *zucchetto*, for the benefit of Danjou and Paul Astier.

"Monsignor, he say to me: 'Peppino — '"

"And the lady, count, the lady at the station?"

"Cristo! how lovely she was!" says the Italian in a low voice; and in the next breath, to correct what may have seemed a too prurient avowal, he adds in a coaxing tone: "*Sympatica*, above all things, *sympatica!*" Lovely and sympathetic; all Parisian women seem so to him. Ah! if he were

not obliged to resume his duties. And, enlivened by the wines of France, he describes his life at the *gardes-nobles*, the perquisites of the service, the hope that they all have on entering it, of making an advantageous marriage, of winning for themselves, on the day of a pontifical audience, some rich English Catholic, or some fanatical Spanish girl who has come from South America to bring her offering to the Vatican. — "Ze uniform is pretty; and ze meesfortunes of ze Holy Fazer, zat gives us his soldiers a romantic, cheevalric prestigio, which zhenerally please ze ladies."

It is quite true that with his manly young face, his gold lace gleaming softly in the moonlight, his skin-tight, white uniform, he reminds one of the heroes of Ariosto or Tasso.

"Well, my dear Pepino," says the bulky Lavaux, in his mocking, snarling voice, "the fine match that you are looking for you have right here, under your hand."

"*Comé!* under my hand!"

Paul Astier is startled and listens intently. As soon as a rich marriage is mentioned he thinks that his is to be whisked away.

"*Parbleu!* the duchess. — Old Padovani is on his last legs."

"But — Prince d'Athis?"

"He 'll never marry her."

Lavaux is to be believed, being the prince's friend — the duchess's too for that matter, but in the impending cataclysm he has taken his stand on the side which he deems the stronger. "Go in

and win, my dear count. There 's money there — lots of it — and high connections; the woman herself is not too badly rubbed."

"Cristo! how lovely she is!" sighs the other.

"*Simpatica*, above all things," says Danjou, with a sneer.

And the *garde-noble*, after a brief pause of astonishment, overjoyed to meet an academician of so much intelligence, replies: "Yes, yes — *simpatica* — *precisamente* — I say zat to myself."

"And then," Lavaux chimes in, "if you like cosmetics, shams, bandages, trusses, you will be satisfied. They say she 's fairly larded, and wears a girdle of leather and iron under her clothes — Charrière's best patient."

He speaks in his usual voice, without the slightest concealment, facing the dining-room, from which the light shines through the low window on his rubicund, cynical face, the typical face of a freedman, a parasite, and his breath is still hot with truffles and salmis, with the whole sumptuous dinner which he has just eaten and which he belches in vile, ignoble calumnies. See! here are your stuffed truffles; here are your capons, and your "châteaux" of various brands at twenty francs the glass. They have formed a partnership, he and Danjou, for this sort of evil-speaking, which is very popular in society. And they know everything and tell everything. Lavaux starts the filth on its journey, Danjou elaborates it; and the ingenuous *garde-noble*, uncertain as to what he ought to believe, trying to laugh, but with the

thought that the duchess may surprise them lying heavy on his heart, feels a genuine sense of relief when he hears his uncle calling him at the other end of the terrace, "Ho! Pepino." — The nunciature is closed early, and he is thus made to expiate in virtuous living the misadventures of the *berretto.*

"Good-night, messieurs."

"Good luck, young man."

The nuncio has gone. Now for the surprise! At a signal from the duchess, the author of *Roxelane* takes his place at the piano and drags his beard across the keys, striking a few soft chords. Instantly the high portières at the far end of the salons are drawn aside, and through the long line of gleaming salons comes a delicious brunette in dancing bands and balloon skirts, running slowly on the tips of her gilt slippers, escorted at arm's length by a dismal personage with curled hair and a dead man's face cut by a moustache of blackened wood. Déa, Déa, the craze of the day, the fashionable toy, and her teacher, Valère, leader of the ballet at the Opera. *Roxelane* was given first this evening, and, still excited with the triumph of her saraband, the little one has come to dance it a second time for the duchess's imperial guest.

Really, the "perfect friend" could not possibly have invented a more agreeable surprise. To have there, before him, for his special behoof, almost in his face, that pretty eddying mass of muslin, that panting breath, fresh and youthful, to hear

all the little creature's strained muscles crack and vibrate like the main-sheet in a gale — what bliss! and Monseigneur is not the only one who enjoys it. At the first pirouette the men draw near, forming a close, greedy circle of black coats, forcing the few women present to stand outside and look on from afar. The grand duke is hustled unceremoniously in that crowd, for as the dancer's movements are accelerated the circle contracts, to the point of interfering with the evolutions of the saraband; and academicians and diplomatists, leaning forward, breathing very hard, craning their necks, their decorations and grand-crosses jingling like bells, display hideous grins of pleasure, lips parted, toothless mouths wide open, and emit little bursts of laughter like neighs. Even Prince d'Athis relaxes the scornful curve of his profile before that miracle of graceful, pirouetting youth, who, with the toe of her slipper, tears off all those worldly masks; and the Turk, Mourad Bey, who has been buried in an easy-chair and has not spoken a word during the evening, is now gesticulating in the front row, with dilated nostrils and eyes starting from his head, and uttering the guttural cries of a lustful, unbridled Caragouss. Amid that frenzy of *vivats* and *bravos*, the damsel leaps and whirls and dissembles so gracefully the muscular labor of her whole body, that her performance would seem to be very easy, the diversion of a dragon-fly, were it not for a few drops of perspiration on the firm flesh of the full, uncovered breast, and the smile at the

"At the first pirouette the men draw near, forming a close, greedy circle of black coats"

corner of the lips, — a forced, painful, almost evil smile, which betrays the effort, the weariness of the entrancing little animal.

Paul Astier, who does not care for dancing, has remained on the terrace smoking. He hears the applause in the distance, with the shrill chords of the piano, the accompaniment to a profound reverie during which he sees clearly, little by little, what is taking place within him, just as, his eyes becoming accustomed to the darkness, he perceives the great trunks of the trees in the garden, their quivering foliage, the fine, close, old-fashioned trellis work, in perspective, against the wall in the background. — It is hard to succeed; one must have breath to reach one's goal, that goal which seems always within reach, but which constantly recedes, rises higher. — That Colette! every moment it seems as if she were going to fall into his arms; then, when he goes back to her, he has to begin all over again, to make his conquest anew. It is as if some one were amusing himself, during his absence, by pulling down what he has built. — Who can it be? — The dead man, of course! that beastly dead man. It is absolutely necessary to be there by her side, from morning till night; but how is one to do it, with the demands of life, work to be done, and so much running about after money?

A light step, a rustling of heavy velvet — his mother is looking for him and is anxious about him. Why does he not come into the salon with all the rest? She leans on the balustrade beside

him and insists upon knowing what is troubling him.

"Nothing, nothing." — But when he is pressed, questioned closely, he adds: "The matter is — the matter is — that I have had enough of this life of dying of hunger. Notes, protests, all the time. Fill up one hole and open another. I 'm at the end of my rope; I can't stand it any longer!"

From the salon come loud shouts, wild laughter, and the colorless voice of Valère, the leader of the ballet, calling to Déa the directions for the *charge* of a ballet in the old style: "One beat — two beats — Love meditating a theft."

"What do you need?" whispers the mother, trembling from head to foot. She has never seen him like this.

"No, it's no use, you could do nothing; it 's too much."

She insists: "How much?"

"Twenty thousand!" — And it must be at the bailiff's to-morrow before five o'clock — or else, execution, sale, a multitude of vile things, rather than endure the shame of which — He chews fiercely at his cigar and at his words: "Better to blow my brains out."

Ah! it needed but that. — "Hush! hush! — To-morrow, before five o'clock." — And passionate, frantic hands rush at his lips to tear from them or force back the horrid word "death."

VI.

THAT night she did not sleep, with those horrible figures shooting through her brain: Twenty thousand francs! Twenty thousand francs! Where could she obtain them? to whom could she write? And so little time before her! Names, figures passed like lightning flashes, gleamed for a moment on the ceiling in the bluish reflection of the night-light, to vanish and give place to other names, other figures, which disappeared as quickly. Freydet? She had just made use of him. — Samy? — not a sou until he was married. — Whom, then? As if one could borrow twenty thousand francs, as if any one would lend them! No one but that provincial poet would do it. — In Paris, in "Society," money plays only a hidden part. People are supposed to have money, to pass their lives out of reach of all these miseries, as in the society comedies. To be false to that tacit convention would mean elimination from good society.

And while Madame Astier cudgelled her brains, in a fever of excitement, her husband, his chest rising and falling regularly, lay beside her. One of the depressing circumstances of their life *à deux* was that bed, occupied jointly, bourgeois fashion, where they had slept thirty years side by

side, with nothing in common save the sheets; but the indifference of her silent bedfellow had never so disgusted and enraged her as now. Should she wake him? For what purpose? To talk to him about their child and his desperate threat? She knew so well that he would not believe her, that he would not even turn that enormous back, like a sentry-box behind which he sheltered himself. For an instant she had an idea of falling upon him, of assailing him with fists and nails, of crying aloud to that heavy, selfish sleeper: "Léonard, your archives are on fire!" And as the word "archives" flashed through her brain, she came within an ace of jumping out of bed herself. The twenty thousand francs were found!—Upstairs in the document case.—How had she failed to think of it sooner?—Until dawn, until the last flicker of the night-light, she elaborated her plan, lying motionless and quiet, with the look of a thief in her wide-open eyes.

She rose early and prowled about the apartment all the morning, watching her husband, who had intended to go out, then changed his mind and worked at classifying his treasures until breakfast. He went to and fro between his study and the garret, his arms filled with papers, humming good-humoredly, much too dense to understand the nervous restlessness which filled the atmosphere of the cramped lodgings, kept the furniture in motion, and magnetized the doors and door-knobs. Tranquillized by his work, he was very talkative at table, told idiotic stories which she

knew by heart, stories as interminable as his crumbling of the everlasting Auvergne cheese with the end of his knife at dessert; and still he kept pecking at the cheese, and still he added anecdote to anecdote. And how slow he was about starting for the meeting of the Institute, preceded to-day by a meeting of the committee on the Dictionary! what a long time he wasted on the most trivial details, despite her longing to push him out-of-doors!

When he had turned the corner of Rue de Beaune, she ran to Corentine's wicket, without even closing the window.

"A cab, at once!"

And alone, alone at last, she darted up the stairway leading to the archives.

Stooping because of the low ceiling, she tried the keys of a bunch that she found in the lock of the document case, and, as she failed to find the right one and time was pressing, she tried, without hesitation, to break part of the frame. But her strength failed her, she broke her nails. She must have something to use as a lever; she opened the drawer of the card-table, and the three letters, the three Charles the Fifths she was seeking, lay before her, ragged and yellow with age. Such miracles do happen! — Stooping to the light of the low window, she made sure that they were the right ones: "To François Rabelais, master in all sciences and good letters." — She read no more, rapped her head smartly as she rose, but was not conscious of it until she was in the cab which was

taking her to Bos's establishment on Rue de l'Abbaye.

She alighted at the end of that short, quiet street, lying in the shadow of Saint-Germain-des-Près and the red brick building of the School of Surgery, where a few private carriages with the sumptuous liveries of messieurs the professors were waiting. Very few passers; pigeons pecking on the sidewalk, who flew away as she walked to the shop, half books, half curiosities, which displayed directly opposite the school its antique sign, most fitting in that nook of old Paris: "Bos, Archivist — Paleographer."

There was a little of everything in that show-window: old manuscripts, account-books with edges eaten by mould; antique, tarnished missals, book-clasps; and, pasted on the long windows, *assignats*, old posters, plans of Paris, ballads, military pay-orders stained with blood, autographs of all periods, a poem by Madame Lafarge, two letters from Chateaubriand to Pertugé, bootmaker; and names of celebrities, ancient and modern, at the foot of invitations to dinner, sometimes of requests for money, confessions of destitution and love confidences, well calculated to inspire one with a fear and horror of writing. All these autographs were marked with their respective prices; and Madame Astier, as she paused a moment at the window, espied, beside a letter of Rachel's quoted at three hundred francs, a note from Astier-Réhu to his publisher, Petit-Séquard: two francs fifty. But that was not what she was

looking for behind the green silk screen which concealed the interior and the profile of the archivist-paleographer, of the man with whom her business lay. At the last moment she had a thrill of apprehension: "If only he is here!"

The thought that her Paul was waiting for her drove her at last into the darkness, into the dusty mustiness of the shop; and being ushered immediately into a second small room at the rear, she undertook to explain to M. Bos, a stout, unkempt, red-faced man, with the head of an orator at public meetings, their momentary need of money, and how her husband had been unable to make up his mind to come himself. He did not give her time to tell her whole fabricated story: "Why, of course, madame!" In a trice she had a check on the Crédit Lyonnais, and was being escorted back to her cab with profuse bows and demonstrations of respect.

"A very distinguished woman," he thought, delighted with his purchase; and she, unfolding the check which she had slipped into her glove, read once more the blessed figures and thought, "What a delightful man!" Not a twinge of remorse, either, not even the little gulp that follows the performance of an evil act; woman knows nothing of such things. Absorbed by her desire of the present moment, she has natural blinders which prevent her from seeing what is going on about her, spare her the reflections with which man accompanies his decisive acts. From time to time she thought of her husband's wrath when he

discovered the theft; but that seemed to her very vague and far away; perhaps indeed she was happy to add that trial to all the perturbation she had felt since the night before: "Another pang that I endure for my child."

The fact is that, beneath her tranquil exterior, beneath the rust of the leader of academic society, there was in her what there is in all women, whether of the world or not of the world — passion. The husband does not always find that pedal which moves the feminine key-board; even the lover sometimes misses it; but the son never. In the melancholy, loveless romance which is the fate of so many women, he is the hero, the great leading *rôle*. To her Paul, especially since he had reached man's estate, Madame Astier owed the only real emotions of her life, the delicious agony of suspense, the pallor, the chills, the burning palms, the supernatural intuitions which infallibly caused her to say, "Here he is!" before the carriage stopped; all of which things were unknown to her, even during the first years of her married life, even in the days when the world accused her of frivolity, and when Léonard Astier said good-humoredly: "It 's very strange; I never smoke, and yet my wife's violets smell of tobacco!"

Oh! her frenzy of anxiety when she reached Rue Fortuny and the first pull at the bell evoked no reply! Closed and dumb beneath its high sloping zinc roof, the little Louis XII. mansion, greatly as she admired it, suddenly assumed a sinister

look in her eyes, as did the apartment house, also strongly suggestive of Louis XII., whose two upper floors displayed lines of signs: "To Let — To Let" — on the high mullioned windows. At the second peal of the bell, a noisy, jangling peal, Stenne, the magnificent little valet, in full dress, arrayed in his sky-blue livery, appeared at last in the doorway, sadly embarrassed and stammering over his replies: "Certainly — Monsieur Paul is in — but — but — "

The unhappy mother, haunted by the idea of a catastrophe since the preceding night, had a vision of her son covered with blood and breathing his last; she rushed across the corridor and up the three steps leading to the atelier-salon, which she entered gasping for breath.

Paul was at work, standing in front of his high table in the light from a superb stained-glass window, one pane of which was open, admitting the light upon an unfinished water-color and the open box of paints, while the rest of the room receded in a fragrant and voluptuous half-light. He remained absorbed by his work as if he had not heard the carriage stop, then the two peals of the bell, and the hurried rustling of a dress in the hall. But it was not that poor, worn, black dress which he was awaiting, it was not for her that he was posing in profile over his sketch, nor was it for her that he had prepared those slender bouquets of tall flowers, irises and tulips, and the dish of sweetmeats and cut glass decanters on a small English table.

His exclamation as he turned, "Is it you?" would have told the story to any but his mother. She paid no heed, in her bewilderment at finding him standing in front of her, neatly dressed and charming, very much alive; and without a word as yet, hastily unbuttoning her glove, she triumphantly handed him the check. He did not ask where the money came from, or what it had cost her, but pressed her affectionately to his heart, taking care not to rumple the paper: "Mamma, mamma!" and that was all. She was repaid, although she was conscious of an embarrassed manner on the part of her child instead of the overpowering joy she had expected.

"Where are you going when you leave here?" he asked, in a musing tone, still holding the check in his hand.

"When I leave here?" She gazed at him, in heart-broken amazement. Why, she had just arrived, she certainly intended to pass a few happy moments with him; however, as the prospect displeased him — "Where am I going? — to the princess's. Oh! there is no hurry — it is such a bore to be always weeping for her Herbert. One moment you fancy that she is not thinking of him, and the next she goes at it again worse than ever."

Words came to Paul's lips which he did not say.

"Well! do me a favor, mamma. I am expecting some one; just go and cash this for me and take up my notes at the bailiff's. Will you?"

Would she! By attending to his business,

would she not be with him the longer? While he was endorsing the check, the mother glanced around the studio, hung with tapestries and old lace, where, save a cross-legged stool of old walnut, a few historic mouldings and fragments of entablature hanging here and there, nothing indicated the occupant's profession; and as she thought of her terrors of a few moments before, the sight of the long-stemmed flowers, of the lunch served on a table near the divan, suggested to her the thought that these were strange preparations for suicide. She smiled without the slightest rancor: "Ah! you little monster!" — and contented herself with saying to him, as she pointed with the end of her umbrella to the dish filled with bonbons, —

"Are these to help you blow — what do you call it?"

He too began to laugh.

"Oh! everything has changed since yesterday. My affair, you know, the great affair that I have spoken to you about? Well, this time, I think it is coming to something."

"By the way, so is mine."

"Oh! yes, Samy — the marriage."

Their pretty, false eyes, of a steely gray and much alike, albeit a little faded in the mother, met and searched one another for a moment. "We shall be only too rich, you will see," he said at last; and added, pushing her gently from the room: "Run away — run away!"

That morning Paul had received a note from

the princess, informing him that she would call for him to go "*là-bas.*" *Là-bas* meant to Père-Lachaise. For some time, "she had been at it again," as Madame Astier said. Twice a week the widow carried flowers to the cemetery, candles and *prie-Dieus* for the chapel, and watched and spurred on the workmen; a genuine recrudescence of conjugal fervor. The fact is that, after a long and painful internal struggle between her vanity and her love, between the temptation to remain a princess and the seductive charm of the delightful Paul Astier, — a struggle the more painful because she confided it to no one, except to poor Herbert in her journal every evening, — suddenly Samy's appointment had swept away her resolution; and it seemed to her fitting, before taking a new husband, to bury the first one definitively, to have done with the mausoleum and the dangerous companionship of the too fascinating architect.

Paul Astier was amused by the tremors of that doting little heart, although he did not understand them; he looked upon them as an excellent symptom, the supreme crisis before a momentous decision, but a trifle too long, for he was in haste. He must hurry on the dénouement, make the most of this visit of Colette's, so long awaited, so often postponed, as if, for all her curiosity to become acquainted with the young man's quarters, the princess dreaded a *tête-à-tête*, which would be more complete there than in her own house or in her coupé, under the watchful eye of the ever present domestics. Not that he had ever been too

bold; that he was inclined to sit close, to keep his eyes fixed upon her, was the worst that could be said of him. But she was afraid of herself, therein confirming the judgment of the impertinent young rascal who, being a very adroit strategist in love, had at first sight classified her among the "open towns." He designated by that name those society women who are apparently strongly defended and fortified, protected above and below by the mountain and the river, perched on an elevation, unassailable, but who in reality are carried at the first assault. He did not propose, however, to try the assault this time; a few lively feints, an hour or two of earnest flirtation, enough to leave the marks of his claws without humiliating her, the dead man's dismissal positively decreed — then, marriage and the thirty millions. Such was the blissful dream which Madame Astier had interrupted, and in which he was engrossed anew, at the same table, in the same meditative pose, when the bell once more rang through the house. Consultations, delays. Paul opened his door impatiently: "What is it?"

The voice of a tall footman, dressed in black, whose silhouette stood out against the rain-splashed street, replied in the distance with respectful insolence that Madame la Princesse was waiting for monsieur in her carriage. Paul Astier had the courage to say, in a choking voice: "I am coming." But what rage was in his heart! what vile insults he muttered against that dead man, the memory of whom had surely held her

back! Almost instantly, however, the hope of revenge, probably a very comical revenge and very near at hand, tranquillized his features sufficiently to enable him to join the princess with his usual self-possession, retaining no trace of his anger save a little extra pallor on the cheeks.

The coupé was very hot, as they had had to raise the windows on account of the sudden downpour. Enormous bouquets of violets, wreaths as heavy as lead, were piled on the cushions around Madame von Rosen, and on her knees.

"These flowers annoy you perhaps — shall I open the window?" she asked with the prettily hypocritical cajolery of the woman who has played a mean trick upon you, but wishes to remain on friendly terms none the less. Paul made a very dignified evasive gesture. Whether the windows were open or closed was all one to him. The princess, all pink and gold in her long widow's weeds, which she resumed on cemetery days, felt ill at ease, would have preferred reproaches. She was so cruel to that young man, much more cruel than he thought, alas!

"Are you angry with me?" she said, placing her hand gently on Paul's.

Angry? not at all. Why should he be angry with her?

"For not coming in. I know that I promised, but at the last moment — I did not intend to cause you so much pain."

"You have caused me very great pain."

Oh! these reserved men, these men of breed-

ing — when a word betraying a touch of feeling does escape them, what value it assumes in a woman's heart! It affects her almost as deeply as to see an officer in uniform weep.

"No, no, I beg you, do not grieve any more on my account; say that you are no longer angry with me."

She leaned over very close to him as she spoke, letting her flowers fall, feeling secure against any risk by virtue of the two broad black backs and the tall hats with black cockades sheltered by a huge umbrella on the box.

"Listen to me: I promise to come once, once at least, before —"

She checked herself in dismay. In the sincerity of her effusiveness she was on the point of telling him of their approaching separation, her departure for St. Petersburg. And recovering herself very quickly, she solemnly swore that she would surprise him with a call some afternoon when she was not going *là-bas*.

"But you go every day," he said through his clenched teeth, with such a comical accent of freezing anger that a smile trembled under the widow's veil, and she lowered the window to keep herself in countenance. The shower had ceased; in the wretched yet cheerful suburban street through which the coupé was passing, a hot sun, almost summerlike, announced the end of discomfort, made the dirty shop-windows glisten, and the little handcarts in the gutters, the colored letters of the posters, and the rags fluttering from

the windows. The princess looked out heedlessly, for none of the trivial sights of the street have any existence for people who are accustomed to see them only from the cushions of their carriage, two feet above the ground. The pleasant swaying, the clean windows give to that privileged class a different sort of vision, without interest in anything that is below the level of their glance.

"How he loves me!" thought Madame von Rosen; "how handsome he is! The other certainly has more of the *grand air*, but with that how much handsomer this one would be! Ah! the happiest life is only a mismatched service; there is never a complete assortment."

They drew near the cemetery. On both sides of the road were marble-workers' sheds, with the glaring whiteness of grave-stones, statues, crosses, mingled with the gold of immortelles, and the jet black and white of wreaths and *ex-votos*.

"What about Védrine's figure? — what is our decision?" he asked abruptly, in the tone of a man who proposes to talk of nothing but business.

"Why — Ah! *mon Dieu!*" she continued, weeping, "I am going to hurt you again."

"Hurt me? — how, pray?"

The day before, they had gone for one last look at the paladin, before it was sent to be cast. At a previous visit the princess had been unfavorably impressed, not so much by Védrine's sculpture, at which she had hardly glanced, as by the strange studio, where trees were growing, and lizards and

beetles running over the walls; and on all sides, those ruins, those fallen ceilings, still smelling of incendiarism and revolution. But the little woman had come away from that second interview literally ill. "The horror of horrors, my dear!" So she described her real impression to Madame Astier that same evening, an impression which she had not dared to tell Paul, knowing that he was a friend of the sculptor, and also because that name of Védrine was one of the three or four which were taken up by society in obedience to its conventions, but contrary to its taste, and extravagantly admired, why, it knew not, by virtue of a pretension to artistic originality. That coarse, shapeless form on Herbert's tomb! — oh! no, no! — but she was unable to find a pretext for rejecting it.

"Come, Monsieur Paul, between ourselves — doubtless, it 's a superb thing — A beautiful Védrine, certainly — but confess that it 's a little sad."

"*Dame!* for a tomb —"

"And then, if I must tell you —" She admitted, hesitatingly, that that nude man on a camp bed did not seem to her precisely suitable — it might be taken for a portrait. "And just fancy poor Herbert, so reserved and dignified! What would people say?"

"Really, when I think it over —" began Paul, with the utmost seriousness; and he proceeded to throw his friend Védrine overboard as tranquilly as a litter of kittens. "Why, if that figure

does n't please you, we 'll try another, or none at all. That will be more striking; the empty tent, the bed in place, and no one on it."

The princess was enchanted, especially at the idea that no one would see that horrible naked creature. "Oh! what joy! how good you are! Now I can tell you — I cried about it all night."

As always, when they stopped at the main entrance, the footman took the wreaths and followed at a distance, while Colette and Paul, in the hot sun, walked up a road made soft by the recent shower; she leaned on his arm and from time to time apologized: "I must tire you." Whereupon he would shake his head with a sad smile. There were few people in the cemetery. A gardener and a keeper removed their hats as the princess passed — a regular visitor; but when they had left the avenue and crossed the upper terraces, they were in solitude and shadow, and the shadow rang with the cries of birds among the leaves, blending with the grinding of saws and the metallic blows of stone-cutting tools which one always hears at Père-Lachaise, as in a never-finished city, permanently in process of construction.

Two or three times Madame von Rosen had surprised her companion in the act of casting an annoyed glance at the tall flunkey in a long frock-coat, with a cockade in his hat, the everlasting, lugubrious spy upon their love; and in her eagerness to please him to-day she stopped, and bade

the man wait. She herself took charge of the flowers and wreaths and dismissed the servant, and they were entirely alone in the winding path. That delicate attention did not smooth the wrinkles from Paul's brow, and as he had taken on his unoccupied arm three or four wreaths of Russian violets, immortelles, and Persian lilacs, his wrath against the defunct waxed hotter. He said to himself savagely, "You shall pay me for this!"

She, on the other hand, felt strangely happy, radiant in the selfish enjoyment of health and life which we feel in the neighborhood of the dead. Perhaps it was the heat of the day, those fragrant flowers blending their perfume with the stronger aroma of the yews and box-trees, of the damp earth drying in the sun, and also with another odor, faint, yet bitter and penetrating, which she knew well, but which did not nauseate her to-day as usual, but intoxicated her rather.

Suddenly she shuddered. The young man, without warning, seized the hand that rested on his arm and pressed it, hugged it as if it were a woman's body — poor little hand, that had not the courage to retreat. He tried to part the slender fingers and entwine them in his own, to take full possession; but the hand resisted, contracted in the glove: "No, no! never!" and meanwhile they continued to walk side by side, without speaking, without looking at each other, deeply moved, for everything is relative in lust, and it is resistance that makes desire. At last she surrendered, opened that little clenched hand,

and their fingers griped one another as if they would burst their gloves, —a delicious moment of full confession, of absolute possession. But suddenly the woman's pride awoke. She tried to speak, to prove that she remained unscathed, that all this had taken place far away from her, that she knew absolutely nothing about it; and as she could think of nothing to say, she read aloud the epitaph on a flat gravestone among the brambles: "Augusta, 1847;" while he, breathing hard, murmured: "A love-story, I suppose." Blackbirds whistled over their heads, and tomtits, with a shrill, metallic note, something like the incessant hammering in the distance.

They arrived at the twentieth division, — that part of the cemetery which may be called the old Paris of Père-Lachaise, where the paths are narrower, the trees higher, the tombs more crowded, a wilderness of railings, columns, Greek temples, pyramids, angels, genii, busts, wings open or folded. Of these tombs, vulgar, eccentric, original, simple, ornate, pretentious, or modest, like the existences which they enclosed, some had their stone-work freshly whitened and covered with flowers, *ex-votos*, and little gardens, dainty and graceful. On others the moss-grown slabs, surrounded with brambles and high weeds, were cracked and weather-beaten; but all bore well-known names, typical Parisian names, notaries, magistrates, prominent merchants, their signs displayed in long lines there as in the legal or commercial quarters; and even double names,

signifying the alliance of two families, partnerships of wealth or rank, flourishing signatures, valued bank endorsements, disappeared from the pages of Bottin, but written unchangeably over their tombs. And Madame von Rosen called attention to them: "Look — the So-and-So's," — with the same surprised and almost joyful exclamation with which she would salute a friend's carriage in the Bois. "Mario! can that be the singer?" — always pretending to be ignorant of the clasping of their hands.

But the door of a tomb near them groaned on its hinges and some one appeared — a stout woman in black, plump and rosy, who carried a little watering-pot, did her mortuary housekeeping, looked after the little garden and the chapel as tranquilly as if she were at a Marseillais cottage in the country. She bowed to them over the railing with a kindly smile of interest and resignation, which seemed to say: "Love on, life is short, nothing else is worth while." In their embarrassment their hands separated; and the princess, freed from the evil spell, suddenly went on ahead and took the shortest path among the tombs, in order to reach the prince's mausoleum as speedily as possible.

It stood at the upper end of the "twentieth," in an enormous lot sodded and bright with flowers, surrounded by a massive, low, wrought-iron fence, of the general character of that around the tomb of the Scaligers at Verona. The general effect of the main structure, which this fence was designed

to produce, was squat and effaced, — a genuine representation of the primitive tent of coarse, rough canvas dipped in tannin, the Dalmatian stone affording the reddish tints of the dye. Three broad steps of the same stone, and at the top the opening, flanked by pedestals and tall funeral tripods of black bronze, which looked as if they had been varnished. Above the entrance the Rosen arms on a great tablet, surrounded by scroll-work and also of bronze, so that the shield of the gallant knight sleeping within hung before his tent.

When the princess had entered and distributed her wreaths all about, on the two pedestals, on the sloping stones representing enormous tent-pegs around the base of the structure, she knelt far at the rear in the shadow of the altar, where the silver fringe of two *prie-Dieus* glistened, and the dull gold of a gothic cross and massive candelabra. It was sweet to pray there on the cool flagstones, amid those vestments of black marble whereon Prince Herbert's name stood forth with all his titles, opposite verses from "Ecclesiastes" and the "Song of Songs." But nothing came to the princess's lips save empty words, a mere mumbling, distracted by profane thoughts of which she was ashamed. She rose, bustled among the jardinières, stepped back to judge of the effect of the sarcophagus-bed. The pillow of black bronze with silver cipher was already in place; and that hard bed, with nothing on it, seemed to her both simple and beautiful. However, she

must consult M. Paul, whose waiting steps she heard on the gravel of the little garden, and, mentally approving his discretion, she was about to call him, when the tomb grew dark. The rain was beginning to patter on the glass trefoils of the dome.

"Monsieur Paul! Monsieur Paul!"

He was sitting on a pedestal without shelter from the downpour, and replied at first by a mute refusal.

"Pray come in!"

He persisted in his refusal, and said, very low, very hurriedly, —

"I cannot — you love him too dearly."

"Yes, yes, come!"

She took his hand and drew him to the entrance of the tomb, but the splashing drove them back little by little to the sarcophagus, where they stood side by side, close together, looking out under the low-hanging, lowering sky at all that old Paris of the dead sloping away before them, its minarets, its gray statues, and its multitude of low stones standing like cromlechs among the glistening verdure. No sound, neither songs of birds nor grinding of tools, nothing but the water rushing in all directions and the monotonous voices of two workmen, under the canvas cover of an unfinished monument, discussing together the miseries of toil. The flowers filled the air with fragrance in that energetic reaction which is produced within them by the rain without. The princess had raised her veil; she was faint and her

mouth dry, as when they were ascending the path just before. And as they stood there mute and motionless, they seemed so entirely a part of the tomb that a little rust-colored bird hopped in, shaking his feathers, and pecked for worms between the flags.

"It's a nightingale," said Paul under his breath, in the sweet, oppressive silence. She tried to ask, "Do they sing, in this month?" But he had seized her, seated her on his knee on the edge of the granite bed, and, putting her head back, he pressed upon her parted lips a slow, deep kiss, which she frantically returned. "Because love is stronger than death," said the verse of the Sulamite written on the marble wall above them.

When the princess returned to Rue de Courcelles, where Madame Astier awaited her, she wept long upon her shoulder, passing from the son's arms to those of the mother — each as unreliable as the other — with a flood of lamentations, of broken words. "Oh! my friend, I am so unhappy! If you knew! if you knew!" Her despair was as unbounded as her embarrassment in face of that complicated situation, — formally promised to the Prince d'Athis and having just involved herself with that charmer, that sorcerer, whom she cursed with her whole heart. But the most cruel part of it was her inability to confide her weakness to her loving friend; for she knew well that at the first word of her confession, the mother would take sides with her son against

Samy, with the heart against the reason, and perhaps would force her into that plebeian marriage, that impossible loss of prestige.

"Well, what is it? what is it?" said Madame Astier, unmoved by these despairing explosions. "You come from the cemetery, I suppose; you have worked yourself up again. Come, when all is said and done, my poor Artemisia —" And, knowing the vain side of that weak nature, she made sport of these prolonged demonstrations, absurd in the eyes of the world, and, to say the least, tending to spoil one's beauty. If it were a matter of another love-marriage! but it was rather the alliance of two great names, of two equal titles, which was in contemplation. Herbert himself, if he were looking down upon her from the skies, could but be satisfied.

"True, if he understood everything, poor dear!" sighed Colette von Rosen, *née* Sauvadon, who set great store by the Russian embassy, and, above all, by her title of princess.

"Look you, my dear, do you want me to give you some good advice? Leave Paris, run away. Samy will start in a week; don't wait for him, but take Lavaux, who knows St. Petersburg and will help you to get settled in the interval. In that way, too, you will avoid a painful scene with the duchess. These Corsicans, you know — one must be ready for anything with them."

"Yes, perhaps it is best to go away." The great advantage of the plan in Madame von Rosen's eyes was that she could thus escape new entangle-

ments, leave behind her what had happened *là-bas*, her momentary madness.

"Is it the tomb?" continued Madame Astier, noticing her hesitation; "is it the tomb that worries you? Why, Paul can finish it perfectly well without you. Come, don't cry any more, darling; the watering becomes you, but you will mould finally." And as she went away in the fading light to wait for the Roule omnibus, the good woman sighed: "Ouf! d'Athis will never know how much this marriage costs me!" Thereupon the consciousness of her fatigue, of her need of a good rest after so many laborious tasks, suddenly reminded her that the most fatiguing of all was still before her, — the return home and the ensuing scene. She had not had time as yet to fix her mind upon it; now she was hurrying toward it, every revolution of the heavy vehicle's wheels brought her nearer to it. She shuddered in anticipation — not with fear, but at the thought of Astier-Réhu's outcries, his frenzy, his coarse, brutal voice; of what reply she could make, and of the trunk! the trunk which would surely be produced again. *Mon Dieu!* what a bore! — She was so weary with her night and her day! Oh! why could it not be postponed till to-morrow? And she was tempted, instead of confessing at once, "I did it," to turn suspicion on some one else, Teyssèdre for instance, until the following morning; then she would be sure of a quiet night at least.

"Ah! here 's Madame. There is some news for

you!" said Corentine, hurrying to open the door in a flurry of excitement, her small-pox more marked than usual — a frequent occurrence under strong emotions. Madame Astier attempted to go to her own room, but the study door was open, and an imperious "Adélaïde!" compelled her to enter. Léonard greeted her with an extraordinary expression on his face, upon which the full light of the lamp fell. He took both her hands, drew her into the light, said in a trembling voice, "Loisillon is dead," and kissed her on both cheeks.

He knew nothing yet, had not been up to the archives; he had been pacing his study floor for two hours, impatient to see her, to give her that information which was of such vast importance to them, for their whole life was changed with those three words:—

"Loisillon is dead!"

VII.

To Mademoiselle Germaine de Freydet, Clos-Jallanges:

YOUR letters drive me to despair, my dear sister. You are bored, you are ill, you want me with you — but what am I to do? Remember my master's advice: "Show yourself; let people see you." And do you think that I could pave the way for my candidacy at Clos-Jallanges, in my gaiters and hunting jacket? For it is not too much to say that the moment is approaching. Loisillon is visibly sinking, and I am making the most of the time afforded by this slow death-agony to form connections in the Academy which will become votes. Léonard Astier has already introduced me to several of these gentlemen; I often go and meet him after the session, and it is a delightful sight to see them coming out, — those men almost all laden with years as well as with glory, walking away arm-in-arm, in groups of three or four, animated and radiant, talking in loud tones, filling the whole sidewalk, their eyes still moist with the hearty laughs they have had inside: "What *verve* that Pailleron has!" — "And how well Danjou answered him!" — For my part, I cling to Astier-Réhu's arm in the chorus of the Immortals, and look as if I were one of them. Then the party separates, the groups

scatter at the corner of the bridge, crying to one another: "Thursday — don't fail!" And I return to Rue de Beaune with my master, who encourages me, advises me, and, being certain of success, says to me with his hearty laugh: "One feels twenty years younger after one of our meetings!"

I verily believe that the dome preserves them. Where else can you find so nimble an old man as Jean Réhu, whose ninety-eighth birthday we celebrated last night at Voisin's? That celebration was an idea of Lavaux, and although it cost me fifty louis, it gave me an opportunity to count up my men. There were twenty-five at table, all academicians save Picheral, Lavaux, and myself; of the twenty-five I am sure of seventeen or eighteen votes, the rest being undecided but well-disposed. The dinner was very well served, and there was much conversation.

While I think of it, I have invited Lavaux to Clos-Jallanges during the vacation at La Mazarine, where he is employed as librarian. We will give him the large room facing the Pheasantry. I don't think very highly of the man, but we must have him, for he is the duchess's zebra. Have I told you that that is the name our society queens give to the bachelor friend, idle, close-mouthed, and active, whom they have always at hand for their errands and the delicate missions which they cannot trust to a servant? The zebra is a sort of courier between powers, and when he is young sometimes makes an agreeable *ad interim* incumbent; but ordinarily the animal is sober, easily

kept and paid by trifling privileges, a seat at the end of the table, and the honor of trumpeting for the lady and her salon. I fancy that Lavaux has succeeded in getting something more than that out of his position. He is so clever and so feared, notwithstanding his good-humored manner; chief scullion in two kitchens, as he says, the academic and diplomatic, he points out to me the bogs and snares with which the road to the Institute is lined, and of which my master Astier knows nothing even now. Poor, innocent great man, who walked straight up the ascent without a suspicion of danger, with his eyes fixed on the dome and trusting in his strength and his works; and who would have broken his neck a hundred times over if his wife, shrewdest of the shrewd, had not guided him without his knowledge.

It was Lavaux who dissuaded me from publishing my *Thoughts of a Countryman* in the interval before the approaching vacancy in the Academy. "No, no," he said, "you have done enough; indeed, it would be a good thing if you could give it out that you will produce no more, that you are done, worked out, simply a society man — the Academy adores that." Taking this in connection with Picheral's invaluable warning, "Don't carry them your books," I see that the fewer works one publishes, the greater one's claim. A very influential personage, this Picheral; another one whom we shall have with us this summer — a room on the second floor, perhaps the old lumber-room; it 's for you to say. It 's a lot of

bother for you, my poor Germaine, and in your wretched state. But what can I do? It is such a pity to have no house in Paris during the winter, to be unable to give receptions like Dalzon, Moser, and all my other competitors. Oh! take care of yourself, get well, for Heaven's sake!

To return to my dinner, we naturally talked a good deal about the Academy, its selections, its duties, and the good and evil which the public attributes to it. According to our Immortals, all the detractors of the institution, all, are poor devils who can't get in; as for the apparently inexplicable cases of neglect, each has its special explanation. When I timidly mentioned the name of Balzac, our great fellow-provincial, Desmnières, the novelist, who used to manage the charades at Compiègne, became much excited. "Balzac! why, did you know him? Do you know whom you are talking about, monsieur? — such a disorderly life, such bohemianism! A man, monsieur, who never had twenty francs in his pocket! I have that fact from his friend, Frédéric Lemaître. Never twenty francs! And you would have had the Academy — " At that, old Jean Réhu, holding his hand to his ear, understood that we were talking about fees for attendance, and told us the clever trick of his friend, Suard, who went to the Academy on the 21st of January, 1793, the day of the king's execution, and took advantage of the absence of his confrères to pocket the whole of the two hundred and forty francs for the meeting.

The old fellow tells a story well, — "I saw that myself," — and except for his deafness, would be a brilliant talker. When I recited a few verses in proposing a toast to his marvellously green old age, the old man replied very kindly, calling me his "dear confrère." My master Astier corrected him: "future confrère." Whereupon there was laughter and applause, and when they took leave of me they all gave me the title of future confrère, with cordial pressures of the hand and significant "*Au revoirs*," alluding to the calls I shall soon make upon them. Mere nonsense, these academic calls, but every one has to make them. Astier-Réhu told me as we left Voisin's that, at the time of his election, old Dufaure allowed him to call ten times without receiving him. But the master persisted, and at the eleventh trial, the door was thrown open to him. One must be determined. "I am at this moment engaged in the vilest and most tiresome business; I am soliciting for the Academy," says Mérimée in his correspondence; and when men of that stamp have set us the example of humility, have we any right to show more pride than they?

As a matter of fact, if Ripault-Babin or Loisillon should die — both are in danger, but Ripault-Babin still inspires me with the more confidence — my only serious rival would be Dalzon. He has talent, means, an excellent cellar, and stands well with the dukes; all he has against him is a sin of his youth, recently discovered: *Toute-Nue*, a little volume of six hundred lines, pub-

lished anonymously at Éropolis, and decidedly *strong*. It is said that he has bought up the whole edition and put it in the fire, but that there are still a few copies in circulation, signed and dedicated. Poor Dalzon is protesting and fighting like a demon, and the Academy reserves its judgment until its inquiry is concluded; that is why my excellent master, without going into details, said to me gravely the other evening: "I shall not vote for M. Dalzon." The Academy is a salon; that must be understood before everything. One cannot enter it except with clean hands and reputation. However, I am too honorable a man and esteem my adversary too highly to use such concealed weapons; and Fage, the book-binder of the Cour des Comptes, that strange little hunchback, whom I sometimes meet in Védrine's studio, and who is thoroughly posted in all the curiosities of bibliography, was sharply sent about his business when he offered me one of the signed copies of *Toute-Nue*. "M. Moser will take it," he retorted, unmoved.

Apropos of Védrine, my position is becoming embarrassing. In the enthusiasm of our first meetings, I urged him to bring his wife and children to us in the country; but how am I to reconcile a visit from him with the presence of the Astiers and Lavaux, who detest him? He is such a rough, original creature! Do you realize that he is a nobleman, Marquis de Védrine, and that even when we were at Louis-le-Grand he dropped the title and the particle, which so many

other people crave in these democratic days when everything except that can be purchased? His motive, do you ask? He wishes to be loved for his own sake; understand him if you can. Meanwhile the Princesse von Rosen declines to accept the paladin which he carved for the prince's tomb, and which was a constant subject of conversation in that family, where funds are often short. "When we have sold the paladin, I am going to have a mechanical horse," the boy would say; and the poor mother, too, relied on the paladin to replenish her empty cupboards, while all Védrine saw in the price of that masterpiece was three months of idling in a dahabiyeh on the Nile. And yet, now that the paladin will not be sold or paid for until God knows when, — after a lawsuit and the verdict of a jury, — do not suppose that they are discomfited in the slightest degree. On arriving at the Cour des Comptes on the day following that bad news, I found my Védrine seated in front of an easel, as happy and pleased as a child, painting on a huge canvas the strange virgin forest growing within the burned edifice. Behind him the wife and child sat in ecstatic admiration, and Madame Védrine whispered to me with the utmost gravity, as she rocked her little girl, —

"We are very happy. M. Védrine has taken to oils."

Is n't it enough to make one long to laugh and cry?

Dear sister, the incoherence of this letter will tell you of the feverish agitation of my existence

since I have been preparing to become a candidate. I attend the "Days" of this one and that one, and dinners and evening parties. I have actually been called good Madame Ancelin's *zebra*, because I attend assiduously at her salon on Fridays, and at her box at the Français on Tuesday evenings. A very countrified zebra at all events, notwithstanding the sudden modifications I have made in my personal appearance in the direction of moderate worldliness. Expect to be surprised when I return. — Last Monday there was a select reception at the Padovani palace, where I had the honor of being introduced to the Grand Duke Leopold. His Highness complimented me on my last book, on all my books, which he knows as well as I know them myself. These foreigners are extraordinary fellows. But I enjoy myself most with the Astiers, in that patriarchal home, so simple, so united. The other day after breakfast a new academician's coat for the master was brought home, and we tried it on together; I say "we," for he insisted on seeing how the palm-leaves would look on me. I put on the coat and hat and sword — a real sword, my dear, which comes out of the scabbard and has a hole for the blood to run through — and upon my word I made a profound impression on myself. However, I tell you this to show you how far this invaluable intimacy extends.

Then, when I return to my tranquil little cell, if it is too late to write to you, I always do a little reckoning. I take a complete list of the

academicians and mark those whom I know to be for me, and those who favor Dalzon. I add and subtract; it 's a most fascinating amusement. I will show you sometime, and you can see for yourself. As I told you, Dalzon has the dukes; but the author of the *Maison d' Orléans*, who is received at Chantilly, is to introduce me there very soon. If I make a favorable impression — and to that end I am learning by heart a certain Battle of Rocroy; you see how cunning your brother is getting to be! — if I make a favorable impression, the author of *Toute-Nue*, published at Éropolis, will lose his strongest supporter. As for my opinions, I don't deny them. I am a Republican, yes; but the inclination is to go too far. And then, you know, I am a candidate first of all. Immediately after this little trip, I intend to return to my Germaine, whom I implore not to grow worse, but to think of the happiness of the great day. Yes, my dear sister, we shall enter the "garden of the goose," as that Bohemian Védrine says, but we must have courage and patience.

Your loving brother,

ABEL DE FREYDET.

I open my letter to tell you that the morning papers announce Loisillon's death. These strokes of fate move one, even when they are expected and discounted. What mourning, what a loss to French letters!

This postpones my return once more, my dear Germaine. Settle with the farmers. Will write again soon.

VIII.

It was written that Loisillon should have all the advantages, even that of dying in the nick of time. A week later the salons would have closed, Paris would have scattered, the vacations of the Chamber and the Institute would have begun, and only a few delegates from the numerous societies of which he was president or secretary would have followed his coffin, behind the seekers for fees of the Academy — nobody else. But with an eye to the future, he departed just in time, on the eve of the Grand Prix, selecting a barren week, without a notable crime, a duel, a famous trial or a political episode, so that the pompous obsequies of the perpetual secretary would be Paris's only distraction.

High mass at noon; and long before the hour an enormous crowd had collected around Saint-Germain-des-Près, so that travel was suspended, only the carriages of invited guests being allowed to enter the square, which was surrounded by a strong cordon of police officers stationed at regular intervals like skirmishers. What Loisillon was, what he had been during his seventy years among men, the meaning of that capital L. with a silver border, on the high, funereal hangings, very few people knew in that crowd, which was

attracted solely by the muster of policemen and by the great space that was cleared for the dead man; — it is always a matter of distance, a vast expanse of empty space, to express respect and grandeur! The rumor having spread that there would be a chance to see actresses and famous men, Parisian gossip in the distance gave names to familiar faces talking in groups before the church.

There, under the black-draped vestibule, is where one must go to hear Loisillon's funeral oration, — the true one, not that which would be pronounced later at Montparnasse — and the genuine review of the man and his work, very different from the articles prepared for the next day's newspapers. The work consisted of a *Journey to the Vale of Andorre*, and two reports published by the National Printing Office at the time that Loisillon was Superintendent of the Beaux-Arts. The man was a typical, cringing, humble, whining solicitor, with the bent back of the courtier and a perpetual gesture of apology, of asking pardon; pardon for his decorations, for his palm-leaves, for his position in the Academy, where the knavery he had learned as a man of business served as a means of fusion between all those diverse elements, to no one of which could he be likened; pardon for his extraordinary fortune, for the promotion accorded to utter nullity, to nimble-footed baseness. Men reminded one another of his remark at a corps dinner, where he bustled about the table with a napkin on his arm, as proud

as a peacock: "What a good servant I would have made!" A fitting epitaph for his tomb.

And while some philosophized thus upon the nothingness of that existence, that nothingness triumphed, even in death. Carriage followed carriage in endless succession to the church door; the long brown or blue coats of liveried servants flew about, ran to and fro, stooped and swept the square with the majestic clatter of carriage doors and steps; the groups of newspaper men respectfully made way for the Duchesse Padovani, of proud and lofty bearing, for Madame Ancelin, blooming in her mourning garb, for Madame Eviza, whose long eyes flashed brightly enough beneath her veil to attract the attention of any agent of a society for the propagation of good morals; for the whole concourse of the ladies of the Academy, its fervent worshippers, its devotees, who had assembled there less to do honor to the memory of the late Loisillon than to gaze upon their idols, those Immortals, fashioned and moulded by their adroit little hands, genuine women's handiwork, upon which they had expended their unemployed stores of pride, ambition, cunning, and determination. Divers actresses were present, on the pretext that some dramatic orphanage or other was presided over by the deceased, but in reality obeying the irresistible impulse to have a hand in everything, which consumes them all. Dissolved in tears and of tragic bearing, they might readily be taken for near relations. Suddenly a carriage arrives and deposits

a mass of excited, frantic veils, a grief which it makes one's heart ache to witness. The wife surely? No; Marguerite Oger, the lovely melodramatic actress, whose appearance causes a prolonged murmur and a great jostling among the curious at the four corners of the square. A journalist darts from the porch to meet her, presses her hand, supports her, speaks words of encouragement.

"Yes, you are right, I will be strong."

So she swallows her tears, forces them back with her handkerchief, and enters, or rather makes her entrée, in that high, dark nave where a few tapers are twinkling at the farther end, falls on her knees before a *prie-Dieu*, left centre, prostrates herself, buries herself in prayer, then rises, grief-stricken, and asks a fellow-actress near by: "What did they take at the Vaudeville yesterday?"

"Four thousand and two!" her friend replies in the same dismal tone.

Abel de Freydet, lost in the crowd on the outskirts of the square, heard it said all about him: "Marguerite! That 's Marguerite! Ah! how well she entered!" But his small stature embarrassed him and he was trying in vain to force a passage, when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

"What! still in Paris? The poor sister is hardly pleased, I fancy." Even as he spoke, Védrine drew him on, breaking out a path with his sturdy shoulders through the crowd, above

whom he towered a full head, shouting: "The family, gentlemen!" and guided him to the front row; the provincial being overjoyed by the meeting and a little embarrassed at the same time, for the sculptor talked loud and entirely without restraint, as his custom was.

"So! that lucky dog of a Loisillon; as much of a crowd as Béranger had. This ought to put heart into a young man." He added abruptly, as Freydet uncovered at the appearance of the procession: "What the devil have you done to change yourself so? Turn around. Why, you wretch, you look like Louis-Philippe!" The poet, his moustache shaved off, his hair arranged with a forelock, his pleasant red and brown face beaming between grayish whiskers, drew himself up to his full diminutive height with ceremonious stiffness. And Védrine laughingly continued: "Ah! I understand — your face is arranged for the dukes, for Chantilly. So you are still bent on the Academy, eh? But just look at this masquerade!"

In the bright sunlight, in that broad reserved space, the effect was shocking. Behind the hearse walked the members of the committee, who, through a sardonic freak of chance, seemed to have been selected from the most ridiculous old men of the Institute, their ugliness being enhanced by the costume designed by David, the coat with green embroidery, the three-cornered hat, the parade sword dangling against misshapen legs which David certainly did not foresee. First

came Gazan, his hat awry on his uneven skull, the vegetable green of the coat accentuating the earthen hue of his fat, scaly, proboscidian mask. Beside him the long, sinister form of Laniboire, with the violet streaks, the distorted mouth of a paralytic Mister Punch, concealing his palm-leaves beneath a too short overcoat, below which could be seen the end of the sword and the skirts of the green coat, which, with the three-cornered hat, gave him the appearance of an undertaker's man, much less distinguished, to be sure, than the worthy with an ebony staff who walked ahead of the committee. Others followed, Astier-Réhu, Desminières, all embarrassed and shamefaced, conscious of the grotesque appearance, in the life and light of the street, of those uniforms, endurable only under the high, cold, and, so to speak, historical light of the dome; conscious of it and apologizing for it by their humble mien, but as laughable as an exhibition of monkeys.

"Upon my word! I would like to toss them a handful of nuts, to see 'em run about on all fours." But Freydet did not hear this fresh impertinence from his compromising companion. He made his escape, joined the procession, and entered the church between two files of soldiers with arms reversed. In reality Loisillon's death was a source of the liveliest joy to him; he had never seen him or known him, nor could he love him through his work, that work having no existence; so that the only thing for which he would always be grateful to him was his death, his chair

vacated just in time for his own candidacy. In spite of everything, the funeral pomp with which old Parisians, as a general rule, are thoroughly sated, the double line of soldiers, knapsacks on their backs, their muskets striking the flags with a single blow at the order of a dapper little officer, very young and ill-humored, with the strap about his chin, whose first command this funeral probably was, and, above all, the black uniforms of the band, and the muffled drums, — stirred him to deep, respectful emotion; and, as always when any intense feeling mastered him, rhymes poured into his mind. These began very well: a broadly-conceived, beautiful passage concerning the species of confusion, of nervous excitement, of intellectual eclipse which the disappearance of one of the great men of a country causes in its atmosphere. But he interrupted himself to make room for Danjou, who arrived very late and entered the church amid feminine whispers and glances, staring about with his proud, stern face, with his habitual gesture of passing the palm of his hand over his mouth, as if to make sure that his false teeth were still in place.

"He did n't recognize me," thought Freydet, vexed by the crushing glance with which the academician put down the worm who presumed to make a sign to him; "my whiskers, probably;" and the candidate, his thoughts diverted from his verses, began to meditate upon his plan of attack, his visits, the official letter for the perpetual secretary. But the perpetual secretary was dead.

Would Astier-Réhu be appointed before the vacation? And when would the election be? His preoccupation descended to details, to the coat; should he patronize Astier's tailor or not? And would the tailor furnish the hat and sword too?

"*Pie Jesu, Domine*" — a beautiful operatic voice arose behind the altar, beseeching repose for the soul of this Loisillon, whom the God of mercy seemed inclined to torture cruelly; for the church implored him in all tones, in all keys, in solos and choruses: "Rest, rest, O God! May he sleep in peace after so much excitement and intriguing!" That melancholy, irresistible appeal was answered by the sobs of women in the nave, Margaret Oger's tragic hiccough, her terrible hiccough of the fourth act of "Musidora," rising above all the rest. All this grief made a deep impression on the poor candidate and went to his heart, there to join other griefs, other sorrows; he thought of his dead parents, of his sister, a mother to him, who was given up by all the doctors, and who knew it and talked about it in all her letters. Alas! would she live even until the day of his triumph? Tears blinded him, forced him to wipe his eyes.

"That's too much — too much. No one will believe you mean it," sneered the corpulent Lavaux in his ear. He turned indignantly, but the young officer in a fierce voice gave the order: "Carry — arms!" and the bayonets clashed, while the organ began to moan the "March for a Hero's Death." The procession started from the church;

the committee leading as before, Gazan, Laniboire, Desminières, and his kind master Astier-Réhu. All exceedingly impressive now, the embroidered parrot-green of the uniforms softened in the mysterious light of the lofty arches, they walked down the nave two by two, very slowly, as if with regret, toward the great square of light framed by the open door. Behind the committee came the whole Academy, following its dean, the extraordinary Jean-Réhu, made taller by a long frock-coat, carrying his little brown head, carved from a cocoanut, very high, with a disdainful, absent-minded air, signifying that he had "seen that" an incalculable number of times; and, in very truth, during the sixty years that he had received fees for attending meetings of the Academy, he must have heard no end of psalm-singing, have sprinkled holy water on many glorious biers.

But although he justified in miraculous fashion the title of "Immortal," the group of patriarchs who marched behind him seemed a ridiculous and pitiful parody of it. Infirm, bent double, gnarled like old fruit trees, with feet of lead, nerveless legs, blinking eyes, like those of beasts that prowl at night, those who were not supported tottered along, feeling their way with their hands, and their names whispered by the crowd evoked memories of works long since dead and forgotten. Beside these ghosts, these "gentlemen on leave from Père-Lachaise," as a wit in the escort called them, the other academicians seemed mere boys; they strutted and threw out their chests before the

enraptured eyes of women which burned them through black veils, before the dense crowd and the shakos and knapsacks of the dazzled soldiers. Once more Freydet's salutation to two or three "future confrères" was repelled with cold, contemptuous smiles, like those you see in dreams on the lips of your best friends when they refuse to recognize you. But he had no time to be depressed, being caught by the opposite currents moving in and out of the church.

"Well, Monsieur le Vicomte, we shall have to bestir ourselves now." This remark whispered by the amiable Picheral amid the confusion, the tangle of chairs, started the flow of blood anew in the candidate's veins; but as he passed the catafalque, Danjou, holding out the holy-water sprinkler, murmured without looking at him: "On no account lift a hand; let things take their course." His legs trembled under him. Bestir yourself! Don't lift a hand! Which opinion should he choose as the better, and follow? Doubtless his master Astier would tell him, and he tried to overtake him outside. That was not an easy matter, the square was so crowded while the procession was being arranged, and the coffin, weighed down with innumerable wreaths, was being hoisted to its place. Nothing could be more animated than that outpouring into the sunlight of a lovely day; salutations, worldly remarks altogether foreign to the funeral ceremony, and on every face an expression of joyous relief, of determination to be revenged for that long hour of immobility,

interspersed with depressing music. The discussion of projects, the appointments made, marked the impatience of life, quick to resume its course after that brief halt, and cast poor Loisillon far away into that past of which he was thenceforth a part.

"The Français this evening — don't forget, it 's the last Tuesday," simpered Madame Ancelin.

"Are you going to the cemetery?" Paul Astier asked Lavaux.

"No, I am going to take Madame Eviza home."

"At six o'clock, then, at Keyser's; that will feel good after the speeches."

The mourning carriages approached in a long line, while coupés drove rapidly away. All the windows on the square were crowded, and toward Boulevard Saint-Germain, where people were standing on the roofs of the trams, tiers of heads made dark lines against the blue sky. Freydet, dazzled by the sun, his hat pulled over his eyes, gazed at that crowd stretching away as far as the eye could see, and felt very proud, attributing to the Academy that posthumous glory which could not fairly be attributed to the author of the *Journey to the Vale of Andorre;* but at the same time he was pained to observe that his dear "future confrères" perceptibly kept him at a distance, being absorbed by something else when he approached, or else turning their backs and forming groups to repel the intruder; the very same men who, two nights before, at Voisin's, had taken him by the buttonhole: "When will you be

one of us?" But the hardest blow of all was the defection of Astier-Réhu!

"What a sad misfortune, dear master!" the candidate said to him, assuming a conventional, grieved expression, longing to speak, to obtain a sympathetic word. The other, standing beside the hearse, made no reply, but turned over the leaves of the discourse he was soon to deliver. Freydet said again: "What a sad misfortune!"

"My dear Freydet, you are indecent!" exclaimed the master, sharply, in a loud voice; and after sternly advancing his jaw he resumed his reading.

"Indecent! why?" The poor devil instinctively felt of his buttons, scrutinized himself anxiously to the toes of his boots, but could find no explanation of those words of reproof. What had happened? what had he done?

He was fairly dizzy for a few moments; he vaguely saw the hearse move forward under its swaying pyramid of flowers, a number of green coats behind, then the whole society, and immediately after, but at a respectful distance, a group in which he found himself, impelled by some unknown force. Young men, old men, all horribly depressed and discouraged, across the brow the same deep wrinkle of the one absorbing idea, in the eyes the same look of hatred and suspicion of the neighbor. When he had recovered from his ill-turn and was able to assign names to them, he recognized the withered, disheartened face of Père Moser, the perennial candidate; the honest feat-

ures of Dalzon, the man of the book, the unsuccessful candidate at recent elections; and de Salèles, and Guérineau. The tow, *parbleu!* the men with whom the Academy no longer concerns itself, whom it allows to drag in the wake of the glorious ship, having them safely secured with a stout iron hook. They were all there, all the poor drowned fish, some dead and under water, others still struggling, rolling their piteous, greedy eyes, which crave and beg, and will crave and beg forever. And even while he was registering an oath that he would avoid their fate, Abel de Freydet was following the bait, pulling on the hook, already too firmly caught to be able to escape.

In the distance, along the road cleared for the procession, muffled drum-beats alternated with blasts of the bugle, exciting the passers-by on the sidewalks along the route and the sight-seers at the windows; then the band, with a long shriek, resumed the "March for a Hero's Death." And in face of those imposing honors, that national funeral, that haughty rising in revolt of man, humiliated, vanquished by death, but exalting and bedecking his defeat, it was a fine thing to reflect that it was all for Loisillon, Perpetual Secretary of the Académie Française, — that is to say, for nothing, for less than nothing.

IX.

EVERY afternoon, between four and six, earlier or later, according to the season, Paul Astier went to take his shower-bath at the "Keyser Hydropathic Establishment," at the upper end of Faubourg Saint-Honoré. Twenty minutes of fencing, boxing, or single-stick, then the cold *douche*, the plunge in the pool, and the brief visit, on going forth, to the flower-girl on Rue du Cirque, to have a carnation pinned in his buttonhole; and the walk as far as the Arc de l'Étoile, to get up a reaction, Stenne and the phaeton following along the curbstone. Then a turn under the acacias, where Paul displayed a clear complexion, a woman's skin, calculated to rouse the envy of all women, which he owed to his fashionable hygienic habits. That session at Keyser's also saved him the trouble of reading the newspapers, by virtue of the gossip from stall to stall, or on the couches in the *salle d'armes*, in fencing-jacket, in flannel dressing-gown, and even at the doctor's door while one awaited his turn for a *douche*. Clubs, salons, Chamber, Palais de Justice, Bourse, all the news of the day was retailed freely there, without concealment, amid the clashing of foils and sticks, the calls for the attend-

ant, the loud slapping of hands on bare flesh, the clatter of the wheeled chairs for rheumatics, the heavy plunges which echoed among the resonant arches of the swimming-tank; and, rising above all the uproar of splashing and running water, the voice of good Doctor Keyser, standing on his platform, and the constant repetition, like the refrain of a song, of the word "Turn! turn!"

That day Paul Astier "turned" with a delicious sensation of comfort beneath the beneficent shower, left there the headache and the dust of his unpleasant task and the funereal monotone of academic regrets in the style of Astier-Réhu: "His days are graven in brass — Loisillon's icy hand — he had drained the cup of happiness." O papa! O dear master! — He needed water, rain, in cascades, lashing and stinging, to wash away the memory of that dismal trash. As he returned streaming to his stall, he passed a tall figure coming up from the tank, who nodded shiveringly to him; a stooping figure in an ample India rubber cap which covered his head and part of his face. From the lean, livid features, the stiff, wooden gait, he supposed that it was one of the poor neurasthenics, regular customers of Keyser's, whose silent appearances, like night-hawks, in the *salle d'armes*, when they came there to weigh themselves, presented such a striking contrast to the ringing laughter of overflowing health and strength. And yet the disdainful curve of that long nose, that curl of disgust at the corners of the mouth, reminded him vaguely of some face in

society. And while the bath attendant was rubbing him in his stall, he asked, —

"Who was that who bowed to me, Raymond?"

"Why, it was Prince d'Athis, monsieur," said Raymond, with the pride the plebeian feels in uttering the word "prince." "He has been coming to the baths for some time, always in the morning. To-day he was delayed on account of a funeral, so he told Joseph."

Through the door of the stall, which stood open during this colloquy, he could see in the stall on the opposite side of the corridor the naked figure of Lavaux, an unhealthy, shapeless mass, engaged in fastening above his knee, with buckled garters, long stockings such as women and priests wear.

"I say, Paul, did you see Samy? he is here to get strength;" and he winked comically.

"Strength?"

"Why, yes. He 's to be married in two weeks, you understand; and the poor boy, to strengthen his loins, has taken to cold water and hot points."

"And when does he go to St. Petersburg?"

"Why, at once. The princess has gone before. They 're to be married there."

Paul had an instinctive foreboding of disaster: "The princess! Whom is he going to marry?"

"Where have you been? It 's been the talk of Paris for two days. Colette, of course! The inconsolable Colette. I 'd like to see the duchess's face. She bore herself very well at Loisillon's funeral, but without raising her veil, without a word to any one. It 's a bitter pill, by

Jove! Just fancy — only yesterday we were looking at materials for the faithless one's bedroom at St Petersburg!"

He chattered on in his thick, venomous voice, like that of an aristocratic portress, as he finished buckling his garters; and as an accompaniment to the fiendish story, they could hear, two stalls beyond, the prince's voice encouraging the attendant in the pauses of a volley of resounding slaps. — "Harder, Joseph, harder! Don't be afraid." — Ah! he was getting strength indeed, the villain!

Paul Astier, who, at Lavaux' first words, had crossed the corridor to hear more distinctly, was seized with a frantic longing to burst in the prince's door with a kick, pounce upon him, have a plain explanation with that wretch who was snatching fortune from his hands. Suddenly he realized that he was naked, decided that his wrath was untimely, and returned to dress and calm down a little, understanding that he must talk with his mother first of all and find out the exact position of affairs.

His buttonhole remained empty that evening, and while women's eyes from the line of slow-moving carriages sought the attractive youth in the usual avenue, he was hurrying to Rue de Beaune. Corentine received him with bare arms and in a soiled dress, availing herself of madame's absence to have a grand scrubbing.

"Do you know where my mother dines?"

No. Madame had told her nothing. But monsieur was upstairs, rummaging among his papers.

The narrow stairway leading to the archives creaked under Léonard Astier's heavy step.

"Is that you, Paul?"

The dim light in the hall, his own perturbation prevented the son from noticing his father's extraordinary appearance and the trembling in his voice as he replied to the "How's the master? Mamma not in?"

"No, she is dining with Madame Ancelin, who is to take her to the Français. I shall join them there this evening."

After that the father and son had nothing more to say; two strangers confronting each other, two strangers of hostile race. To-day, however, in his impatience, Paul Astier was on the point of asking Léonard if he knew anything about this marriage, but he instantly thought: "He's too big a fool; mamma can't ever have mentioned it before him."

The father, likewise tortured by a question that he longed to ask, recalled him with an air of embarrassment.

"Listen to me, Paul; just think — I have missed — I was just looking for —"

"Looking for?"

Astier-Réhu hesitated a second, looking closely at the charming face whose expression was never perfectly straightforward because of the deviation of the nose; then he said, in a depressed, sullen tone: —

"No, nothing, it's of no use; you can go."

It remained for Paul Astier to join his mother

in the Ancelin box at the theatre. He had two or three hours to kill. He dismissed his carriage, bidding Stenne come and help him dress at the club, then sauntered slowly in the lovely Parisian twilight, while the round-clipped shrubbery in the Tuileries garden gleamed with brilliant colors as the sky grew dark. A deliciously vague light for dreamers and projectors of deals. The carriages decrease in number. Shadows hurry by, brush against you; you can follow your train of thought undisturbed. And the ambitious youth reflected lucidly, having recovered his *sang-froid.* He reflected as Napoléon did during the last hours of Waterloo; victory in sight all day, and at night utter defeat. Why? What bad play had he made? He replaced the pieces on the chess-board and studied the situation, but could make nothing of it. It was imprudent, perhaps, to have let two days pass without seeing her; but was it not the most elementary tactics, after the episode at Père-Lachaise, to allow the woman to ruminate her little remorse? How could he have expected such an abrupt flight? Suddenly a ray of hope flashed through his mind; knowing the princess as a birdling who constantly changed her plans as well as her perch, he thought that she might not have gone, that he might find her in the midst of her preparations, desperate, undecided, calling upon Herbert's portrait to advise her, and that he might resume possession of her with an embrace. For now he understood and followed in her little brain all the vagaries of her romance.

He called a cab and was driven to Rue de Courcelles. No one there. The princess had gone on a journey that very morning, he was told. With a horrible feeling of discouragement he returned to his own rooms, in order to avoid being spoken to and having to reply at the club. His great Middle Ages barrack rearing its façade like the Tower of Hunger, all lined with signs of "To let," put the finishing touch to the oppression at his heart by the heap of overdue notes of which it reminded him; and then the feeling his way in the dark, in the odor of fried onions which pervaded the whole building, owing to the jaunty little servant's habit of compounding a faubourgian stew on the evenings when his master dined at the club. There was still a little daylight in the atelier; Paul threw himself on a couch, fell asleep wondering why ill-luck should so defeat his prudence and his shrewdest plans, and slept for two hours, after which he awoke transformed. Just as the memory is sharpened during the sleep of the body, so his faculty for intrigue and his determination had not ceased to act during that brief period of repose. He had formed a new plan and had recovered that cold, immovable resolution which is much rarer in our young Frenchmen than gallantry under arms.

He dressed hastily, swallowed two eggs and a cup of tea, touched his beard and moustache lightly with the curling-iron, and when he gave his name at the box-office of the Théâtre-Francais, the most profound observer would not have sus-

pected the slightest preoccupation in that perfect man of the world, nor dreamed of the thoughts contained within that pretty article in black and white lacquer, securely sealed.

Madame Ancelin's worship of official literature had two temples: the Académie-Française, and the Comédie-Française; but as the first was accessible only at irregular intervals to the fervent adoration of its faithful disciples, she fell back upon the other, whose services she attended with great punctuality, never missing a "first night," great or small, or the subscribers' Tuesdays. And as she read no books except those with the imprint of the Academy, so the artists at the Français were the only ones to whom she listened fervently, with expressions of deep emotion or frantic excitement, which began at the box-office and the two great holy-water basins of white marble, which the good lady's imagination had placed at the entrance to Molière's house, in front of the statues of Rachel and Talma.

"Such style! What ushers! What a theatre!"

With her short, fat arms waving excitedly, and the panting breath of corpulence, she filled the corridors with an expansive, noisy delight which caused a murmur to run through the boxes: "There 's Madame Ancelin." On Tuesdays especially, the indifference of the ultra-fashionable audience formed a striking contrast to the proscenium-box in which that stout, good-hearted, pink-eyed pigeon cooed and fluttered with her body half out of the box, chirping aloud: "Oh!

that Coquelin! Oh! that Delaunay! such youthful spirit! What a theatre!" — allowing no one to mention any other subject, and greeting visitors between the acts with little shrieks of admiration for the genius of the academician-author, the charms of the partner-actress.

When Paul Astier arrived the curtain had risen, and as he was familiar with the rites of the cult, and knew that speaking, bowing, or moving a chair was absolutely forbidden at that time, he waited in statuesque immobility in the small salon separated by a single stair from the proscenium-box, where Madame Ancelin sat in ecstasy between Madame Astier and Madame Eviza, Danjou and de Freydet sitting behind them with the faces of captives. At the peculiar sound of the closing of a box-door, followed by a withering "Hush!" for the intruder who thus disturbed the service, the mother turned half around and started when she saw her Paul. What had happened? What had he to say to her of such pressing importance, of such gravity, that he came to that wasps'-nest of ennui, — he, who never submitted to be bored without an object? Money again, doubtless, miserable money! Luckily she would soon have some; Samy's marriage would make them rich. Longing to go to him, to comfort him with the good news, which he perhaps did not know, she had to remain in her place, to watch the stage, to play chorus to her hostess: "Oh! that Coquelin! Oh! that Delaunay! Oh! Ah!" — Unendurable torture to her, that suspense; to Paul also, who

saw nothing but the hot, glaring line of the footlights, and a part of the hall reflected in the mirror panel at the side — stall, boxes and pit, rows of faces, dresses, hats, swimming in a bluish haze, with the discolored, phantom-like appearance of objects seen under water. During the entr'acte, compulsory compliments, —

"Did you see Reichemberg's dress, Monsieur Paul? — that apron trimmed with pink jet? — that design in ribbons? — did you see? Really, this is the only place where they know how to dress."

Callers arrived. The mother had an opportunity to seize her son, lead him to the couch, and there among the wraps, as people went and came, they talked together in undertones.

"Answer me quickly and plainly," he began. "Samy is to be married?"

"Yes, the duchess found it out yesterday. But she came none the less. Those Corsicans are so proud!"

"And the foreigner's name? Can you tell me now?"

"Why, Colette! you suspected as much."

"Not the least in the world. How much do you get for this?"

"Two hundred thousand," she whispered triumphantly.

"Well, your intriguing has cost *me* twenty millions! — twenty millions and the woman!" — he crushed her wrists fiercely and threw in her face the word: "Meddler!"

She was suffocated, dazed by the blow. So

the resistance she had felt at times, the scheming in opposition to her own, came from him! he was behind that little fool's "if you knew," when she was sobbing wildly in her arms! And so, at the end of that mine which they had been digging from opposite sides toward the treasure, with so great an expenditure of cunning, so much patient mystery, with one last blow of the pick they found themselves face to face, empty-handed. They said no more, but glared at each other with their noses awry, their well-matched eyes flashing in the shadow, during the going and coming, the conversation.— Ah! it is a severe discipline, this discipline of social etiquette, with its power to restrain the outcries, the frantic gestures of those two, the impulse to roar aloud and do murder which filled their hearts. Madame Astier first broke the silence, thinking aloud,—

"Perhaps the princess has not gone." Her mouth was distorted with rage; that abrupt departure was an idea of her own.

"We will make her come back," said Paul.

"How?"

"Is Samy here?" he asked, without answering her question.

"I don't think so. Where are you going? What do you mean to do?"

"Let me alone, will you? Don't you interfere at all; really, you have n't enough luck."

He went out in a wave of callers, expelled by the end of the entr'acte, and she resumed her place at the left hand of Madame Ancelin, who

was as excited, as full of adoration as before, in a perpetual state of grace.

"Oh! that Coquelin! Pray look, my dear!"

My dear was in truth distraught, her eyes staring into vacancy, smiling the forced smile of a breathless ballet dancer, and, on the plea that the footlights blinded her, she turned her eyes constantly toward the audience, looking for her son. A quarrel with the prince, perhaps, if he is here. And all through her own fault, her stupid blundering.

"Oh! that Delaunay! Did you see? did you see?"

No, she saw nothing but the duchess's box, which some one had just entered, some one with the youthful, graceful figure of her Paul; but it was little Count Adriani, who was, like everybody else, acquainted with the rupture, and was already starting on the scent.

Until the end of the play, the mother suffered the most excruciating torture, devising a thousand confused schemes which collided in her brain with past incidents, scenes which should have warned her. Ah! fool, fool! How had she failed to suspect?

The end at last! but the going out was so slow, halting at every step, exchanging salutations, smiles, and adieux. — "Where do you go this summer? Do come and see us at Deauville." — Through the narrow corridor, where the ladies finish bundling themselves up, with the pretty gesture to make sure that the earrings are safe in

their ears; down the broad, white marble staircase at whose foot the servants wait, the mother, talking all the while, watched and listened, trying to catch in the buzzing of the great worldly swarm, dispersing for several months, a word, an allusion to some scene in the corridors. At the same moment the duchess descended the stairs, erect and proud in her cloak of white and gold, leaning on the young *garde-noble's* arm. She knew what an infamous trick her friend had played upon her, and the two women exchanged as they passed a cold, expressionless glance, more formidable than the most vehement billingsgate. They knew now what to expect from each other, and that every blow would tell, when dealt on a sensitive spot by cunning hands, in that war to the death succeeding a fraternal intimacy; but they performed their social duties, wearing the same mask of cold indifference, and their two animosities, one powerless, the other venomous, might jostle and elbow each other without emitting a single spark.

Below, in the crowd of footmen and young clubmen, Léonard Astier was waiting for his wife, as he had promised. "Ah! there's the master," exclaimed Madame Ancelin, and, dipping her fingers in the holy water for the last time, she sprinkled everybody with it, — Master Astier-Réhu, Master Danjou, and that Coquelin, and that Delaunay. — "Oh! Ah!"

Léonard vouchsafed no reply, but moved on with his wife on his arm, his coat collar turned

up on account of the strong draught. It was raining out-of-doors. Madame Ancelin suggested driving them home, but without eagerness, like most carriage owners, who dislike to tire their horses and dread above all things the ill-humor of their coachman, who is invariably the best coachman in Paris. Moreover, the master had a cab; he cut short the pleasantries of the lady, who was chirping: "Oh! yes, we know you — you prefer to be by yourselves. Ah! what a happy household!" — and drew Madame Astier away along the water-splashed galleries.

After a ball or an evening party, when a man and wife drive away in their carriage, one is tempted to ask one's self, "Now, what are they going to say to each other?" Not much of anything for the most part; for the man generally emerges bent double with fatigue and somnolence from festivities of that sort, which the wife ekes out in the darkness of the carriage by secret comparisons between her costume, her beauty, and those at which she has been looking, meditating new arrangements of her rooms or her dress. And yet the grimace assumed for society is so impudent, society itself is so egregiously hypocritical, that it would be most interesting to witness the immediate relaxation of the muscles after the official pose, to detect the genuine tones and temperaments, the real relations of the two beings, suddenly set free and unmuzzled, in that coupé rolling through the deserted streets of Paris between the reflections of its lanterns.

To the Astiers these homeward drives were very significant. As soon as they were alone the wife dropped the deference and interest which she displayed before the world toward the master, and talked plainly, taking her revenge for listening attentively to stories which she had heard a hundred times and which bored her to death; he, being naturally good-humored, content with himself and with others, always returned home enchanted, but always amazed by the horrible things his wife told him about the friend's household who had entertained them, the people they had met, tranquilly making the most outrageous accusations with the indifference, the unconscious exaggeration of speech, which is the predominant feature of Parisian relations. Thereupon, in order not to excite her more, he would hold his peace, curl himself up and steal a little nap in his corner. But on this evening Léonard Astier sat erect, paying no heed to the "look out for my dress," uttered in the shrill voice of the woman whose skirts are being rumpled. Ah! little he cared for her dress. "I have been robbed, madame!" he exclaimed, and so violently that the windows trembled.

Ah! great heaven! the autographs! They were very far from her thoughts, especially at that moment, consumed as she was by other causes of anxiety, and there was nothing feigned in her amazement.

Yes, robbed; his Charles the Fifths, his three most valuable documents. But his voice

was already losing the vehement certainty of the attack, his suspicions hesitated in face of Adélaïde's surprise. But she had recovered herself: "Whom do you suspect?" Corentine she considered a reliable girl. There was Teyssèdre. But how was it possible that that brute—

Teyssèdre! He cried aloud, the whole thing seemed to him so clear. With the aid of his hatred for the man of the scrubbing-brush, he explained the crime very satisfactorily, followed the scent from a remark made at the table as to the value of the manuscripts, overheard by Corentine and innocently repeated. — Ah! the villain! he had a regular criminal's head, and what folly it was to neglect the warnings of instinct! It was not natural, you see, the antipathy, the hatred which that scrubber aroused in him, in him, Léonard Astier, member of the Institute! His account was settled, the baboon! He should have a taste of the galleys.

"My three Charles the Fifths! — Think of it!" He proposed to enter a complaint at once, before going home. She tried to detain him. "Are you mad? Enter a complaint after midnight!" But he persisted, and thrust his head and shoulders out into the rain to give the driver his directions. She was obliged to pull him back by force; and being completely tired out and exhausted, with no courage to follow up the lie, to ease off the sheet and haul it taut again gently, she blurted out the whole story, —

"It was n't Teyssèdre. It was I! — there!" —

then, without stopping for breath, she described the visit to Bos, the payment of the money, the twenty thousand which she must have at any price. The silence which followed was so long that at first she thought it meant a syncope, an apoplectic stroke. No; but like the child who falls or runs against something, poor Crocodilus had opened his mouth beyond all measure to explode his wrath, and had drawn in such a long breath that he could not make a sound. But at last he emitted a roar that filled the Carrousel, through which their cab was then passing, splashing through pools of water.

"Robbed! I have been robbed! my wife has robbed me for her son!" and his delirious rage poured forth, mingled with peasant oaths of his native mountains. "Ah! *la garso!* Ah! *li bougri!*" — exclamations of the repertory, the "Justice! Great heaven! I am lost!" of Harpagon weeping for his casket, and other choice bits which he had so often read to his pupils. It was as light as day on the great square, where, the performances in the theatres being just at an end, omnibuses and carriages ploughed furrows in all directions in the high, radiating lights of the electric lamps.

"Pray be quiet," said Madame Astier; "everybody knows you."

"Except you, madame!"

She thought that he was about to strike her, and in the present excited state of her nerves, perhaps that would not have displeased her. But

he suddenly calmed down before the fear of a scandal, swearing, in conclusion, on his mother's ashes, that he would pack his trunk on returning home, and be off to Sauvagnat forthwith, while madame could go with her knave, her spend-all, to enjoy the fruit of their crimes.

Once more the old high trunk with the great nails journeyed from the anteroom to the bedroom. A few sticks still remained in it from the last winter, but that did not deter the Immortal, and for an hour the house rang with the falling of billets of wood and the slamming of doors of the closets which he rummaged, throwing in among the chips and bits of dry bark, linen, clothes, boots, even the green coat and embroidered waistcoat for the great meetings, neatly wrapped in a towel. His wrath, finding a vent in this exercise, diminished as the trunk filled, and the remaining swell and dull rumbling proceeded mainly from the feeling that he was so weak, bound on all sides, welded to Paris, not to be uprooted; while Madame Astier, sitting on the edge of an armchair, arrayed for the night, a piece of lace thrown over her head, watched him work and murmured with a placid, ironical yawn, —

"Come, come, Léonard."

X.

"To my mind, persons as well as things have some passion, some weak point in which they should be attacked, if you wish to handle them easily and hold them fast. That point I know, and therein lies my strength, d'ye see!—Driver, to the Tête-Noire."

At Paul Astier's bidding the open landau in which Freydet, Védrine, and he displayed their three funereal black silk hats in the radiant afternoon sunshine, turned to the right at the bridge of Saint-Cloud and drew up in front of the public house mentioned; and each jolt of the lumbering hired carriage on the loose stones in the square disclosed a significant long scabbard of green serge protruding from the lowered hood. For his meeting with d'Athis, Paul had selected as his seconds Freydet first of all, because of his title and his particle; then Count Adriani; but as the nunciature did not look kindly on this new scandal after the misadventure of the *berretto*, he had been obliged to replace young Pepino by the sculptor, who would perhaps consent, at the last moment, to appear as a marquis in the newspapers and the police reports. Apparently, it was in no wise a serious affair; a quarrel at the club, at the card-table, where the prince had taken his seat

for a last game before leaving Paris. But it was impossible to arrange matters, especially because of the difficulty of retracting with a young rake like Paul Astier, who was frequently quoted in the *salle d'armes*, and whose targets were exhibited in the show-case at the shooting-gallery on Avenue d'Antin.

While the carriage waited in front of the terrace of the restaurant under the discreet and knowing glances of the waiters, a short fat man in white gaiters, white cravat, and silk hat, and with the nimble graces of a watering-place doctor, waddled out of a lane and waved his umbrella to them in the distance.

"There 's Gomès," said Paul.

Doctor Gomès, formerly an intern in the hospitals of Paris, had been ruined by gambling and by a liaison of long standing; he was called "my uncle" by prostitutes, and was a low sort of *condottiere*, not evil at heart, but ready for anything, and making a specialty of expeditions of this sort: two louis and a breakfast. At the moment he was living in the country, at Cloclo's, Ville d'Avray, and he arrived at the rendezvous entirely out of breath, with a gripsack in his hand containing his instrument-case, drugs, bandages, and splints — enough to equip an ambulance.

"Prick or wound?" he said, taking a seat in the landau opposite Paul.

"Prick, prick, doctor. Swords of the Institute. The Académie Française against the Moral and Political Sciences."

Gomès smiled, hugging his bag between his legs, —

"I did n't know. I brought the whole outfit."

"You must unpack it, that will make an impression on the enemy," observed Védrine, with his usual tranquil manner. The doctor blinked, somewhat disturbed by these two faces unknown to the boulevard, whom Paul Astier, who treated him like a servant, did not even deign to introduce to him.

As the landau started, the window of a "*cabinet de société*" on the first floor opened and disclosed a couple of curious appearance; a long, slender girl, with light blue eyes, in her corsets, bare-armed, with her breakfast napkin only partially concealing her neck and shoulders. By her side was a bearded abortion, a dwarf of the country-fair type, of whom nothing could be seen save the well-oiled head hardly showing above the window-sill, and the disproportionately long arm thrown like a tentacle around the waist of Marie Donval, the *ingénue* at the Gymnase. The doctor recognized her and called her by name. "With whom is she, in heaven's name?" The others turned; but the girl had disappeared, leaving only the hunchback's long head, looking as if it had been cut off and laid on the window-sill.

"Why, it's Père Fage!" Vedrine waved his hand to him, and added, amused at de Freydet's indignation: "What did I tell you? — the prettiest girls in Paris."

"What a frightful thing!"

"Does that surprise you, Monsieur de Freydet?" And Paul Astier began a savage diatribe against woman. A spoiled child, with all the perversity, all the wickedness of the child, its instincts of trickery, lying, sulkiness, and cowardice. — And gluttonous, and vain, and inquisitive! Plenty of talk, but not an idea of her own, and in discussion full of pitfalls, windings, and slippery places, like a sidewalk on a sleety night. Talk on whatever subject you choose with a woman! — You find neither kindness, nor pity, nor intelligence; not even common-sense. She deceives the husband for the lover, whom she loves no better; she has an abominable dread of maternity, and the only cry of love she ever utters in which there is no falsehood, is: "Take care!" There she is, the modern woman. Capable of stealing, ready to commit any base villany for a hat, for a new dress from Spricht's; for in reality she cares for nothing but dress! And to realize how much she cares for it, one must have gone, as he has, with the most *chic*, the most aristocratic society women, to the great dressmaker's parlors. On intimate terms with the First Assistants, inviting them to breakfast at their château, kneeling in adoration before old Spricht as before the Holy Father; — why, the Marquise de Roca-Nera actually took her little girls there and almost asked him to bless them!

"Fact!" interjected the doctor, with the automatic movement of a salaried parasite whose neck is unhinged by perpetual approbation. There

was a pause of surprise and embarrassment, as if the conversation had been thrown off its balance by the abrupt, inexplicable, and vehement outbreak on the part of one ordinarily so cold and self-controlled. The sun was very oppressive, reflected by the stone walls that bordered the steep road up which the horses toiled painfully, making the gravel shriek.

"As an instance of the charity, the pity of woman, I have seen this." Védrine was speaking, with his head thrown back against the hood, his eyes half closed upon things which he alone saw. "Not at the great dressmaker's, no! but at Hôtel-Dieu, in Bouchereau's department. A white-washed cell, an iron bed with the bedclothes thrown back, and upon it, entirely naked, dripping with perspiration and foam, writhing, contorted like a clown, jumping about and roaring till the whole neighborhood rang again, was a madman in the last paroxysm. Beside the bed were two women — one on each side — the nun and a little student in Bouchereau's course, stooping without fear or disgust over the miserable wretch, whom no one else dared approach, wiping from his forehead and lips the sweat of anguish and the foam which strangled him. The sister was praying all the time, the other not; but in the similar expression of their eyes, the similar tenderness of those fearless little hands, seeking out the martyr's slaver under his teeth, in the heroic, motherly grace of movements that were never weary, one felt that they were both women

— women! And one could but kneel there and sob."

"Thanks, Védrine," murmured Freydet, who was suffocating, thinking of his dear one at Clos-Jallanges. The doctor moved his head: "Oh! to be sure — " But Paul Astier's dry, nervous voice cut him short.

"Oh! yes, in hospitals, I grant you. Being infirm themselves, they adore that sort of thing; nursing, dressing wounds, washing, warm sheets, basins — and then the chance of lording it over those who are ill and weak." His voice became a hiss, rose to the shrill pitch of his mother's, while his cold eye emitted a wicked little flame which made the others think, "What 's the matter with him?" and suggested to the doctor this judicious reflection: "He can talk all he pleases about pricks and swords of the Institute; I would n't like to be in the prince's skin!"

"Now, as to the maternal instinct of woman," sneered Paul, "we have as a pendant to our friend's *chromo*, Madame Eviza, who, being eight months with child, because her banker husband refused her a set of jewels, pounded her stomach with her fists, ran against the corners of the furniture: 'Here, this is for your brat, vile beast! — here, this is for your brat!' And as to woman's refinement and loyalty, take the little widow who, right in her dead husband's tomb, on the very stone of his grave — "

"Why, you 're talking about the matron of Ephesus," Védrine interposed. The discussion

became more animated, although speech was made difficult by the jolting of the wheels — the never-ending discussion between men, concerning woman and love.

"Attention, messieurs!" said the doctor, who, as he was riding backwards, saw two carriages coming rapidly up the hill. In the first, an open calèche, were the prince's seconds, whom Gomès, after standing up to look, named in a tone of deep respect as he resumed his seat: "Marquis d'Urbin, General de Bonneuil — of the Jockey Club — very *chic!* — and my confrère Aubouis." A hungry fellow in his profession, this Doctor Aubouis, but with a decoration; his fee therefore was a hundred francs. A private carriage followed, in which d'Athis, sadly bored by the whole business, kept himself out of sight with his Lavaux. For five minutes the three carriages climbed the hill in a line, like a wedding or funeral procession, and nothing could be heard but the sound of wheels, the heavy breathing or snorting of the horses, and the jangling of their curb chains.

"Pass them," said an arrogant, nasal voice.

"That 's right," said Paul, "they go ahead to prepare our quarters."

The wheels grazed on the narrow road, the seconds exchanged a bow, the doctors a smile of fellowship. Then the coupé passed, and they caught a glimpse through the clear glass, raised notwithstanding the heat, of a morose, impassive face, pale as a corpse. "He will be no paler an

hour hence, when they pick him up with a hole in his side," thought Paul; and he saw the blow in his mind's eye, a feint, then a straight home-thrust, between the third and fourth ribs.

At the top of the hill the air was cooler, laden with the fragrance of linden blossoms, acacias, and roses; and behind the low park walls were great lawns over which the shadow of the trees moved to and fro. A bell rang in the distance.

"We have arrived," said the doctor, who knew the spot, the former stud farm of the Marquis d'Urbin, which had been for sale two years, all the horses having been taken away except a few fillies, which they saw capering about here and there in fields surrounded by high fences.

They were to fight at the farther end of the property, on a broad open space in front of a stable of white masonry; and they reached the place by sloping paths overgrown with weeds and moss, where the two parties walked together without speaking, absolutely in accordance with propriety. Védrine alone, who abhorred all social forms, exclaimed, to the utter dismay of de Freydet, solemn as a judge in his high collar, "Look! there 's a lily of the valley!" and plucked a sprig of it; then, impressed by the impassive splendor of nature in face of the idiotic agitation of men, the tall trees climbing the hillside opposite, the distant prospect of clusters of roofs, of glistening water, of haze blue with heat, he added: "How lovely it is! how calm!" waving his hand mechanically toward the horizon and

addressing some one who was walking behind him with much creaking of fashionable boots. Oh! the contempt with which Védrine was overwhelmed, and the landscape with him, and the whole heavens! for Prince d'Athis had an unexampled faculty of expressing contempt. He expressed contempt with his eye, — that famous eye whose flaming glance Bismarck could not support, — he expressed it with his horse's nose, with his mouth that drooped at the corners; he expressed it without knowing why, without speaking, without listening, without reading or understanding anything; and his diplomatic eminence, his success with women and men of the world were born of that freely lavished contempt. In reality this Samy was but an empty bell, a puppet whom an intelligent woman in her compassion had picked from the refuse tub, from among the oyster shells of night restaurants, whom she had raised to his feet and to very high position, whispering to him what he must say, and better still when he must hold his tongue, suggesting his gestures, his every act, down to the day when, finding that he had reached the top, he kicked away the stool for which he had no further use. Society generally considered that a very smart proceeding; but such was not Védrine's opinion, and the "silk stocking filled with mud," a phrase invented for Talleyrand, returned to his mind as he watched that personage, whose bearing was so haughty and so admirably well-bred, stalk majestically by. Evidently this duchess was a

woman of no mean ability, since she had concealed her lover's utter nullity by making him a diplomat and academician, by muffling him in those two dominoes of the carnival of officialdom, equally threadbare, notwithstanding their prestige before which society still bends the knee; but Védrine could hardly understand how she could have loved that empty-headed, hard-hearted mummy. Was it his title of prince? She was of a family as great as his. Was it the English *chic*, the frock-coat fitting tight to that back which reminded one of a man who has been hanged, and the ugly, dung-colored trousers? Must one believe the scornful comments of this pirate of a Paul Astier on woman's natural inclination for the low, for any moral or physical deformity?

The prince reached the waist-high wall that separated the path from the field, and, whether because he distrusted his shaking legs, or because he considered the exertion undignified for so exalted a personage, he hesitated, being especially annoyed by the presence of that tall devil of an artist whom he felt close on his heels. He resigned himself at last to make a détour as far as the beginning of the wooden fence. The other winked his little eyes: "No, no, my man; it 's of no use for you to take the longest way, for you 've got to arrive in front of yonder white house sooner or later; and who knows that you are not to receive the just wages of your rascalities there? — for everything is paid for in the end." Having eased his mind by this soliloquy, he leaped the

wall with a vigorous but altogether undignified spring, without even putting his hand on it, and joined the group of seconds, who were engaged in drawing lots for positions and weapons. Despite the stiff, solemn expressions of their faces, to see them leaning over to look at the coin, to see whether it was head or tail, and running to pick it up, you would have said they were great schoolboys, wrinkled and grizzled, in the playground. While they were discussing a doubtful point, Védrine heard his name called softly by Astier, who was removing his outer garments behind the little stable, and emptying his pockets with the utmost coolness.

"What is that general mumbling about?" he asked. "His cane within reach of our swords to prevent any accident! I won't have it, you understand — this is no duel between recruits; we are two old soldiers, two of the *class.*" He was jesting, but his teeth were clenched and there was a savage gleam in his eye.

"So it 's serious, is it?" inquired Védrine, looking him in the eye.

"As serious as possible."

"It 's a funny thing that I suspected as much." And the sculptor went to make his declaration to the general, a brigadier of cavalry, scarred from his heels to his satyr-like ears, which vied with Freydet's in brilliancy of coloring; as he listened they became suddenly crimson, as if blood had been splashed on them. — "Agreed, m'sieu! Certainly, m'sieu!" — The words stung like

blows of a whip. Did Samy, whom Doctor Aubouis was assisting to turn up his shirt sleeve, hear them? Or was it the appearance of the lithe, catlike, muscular youth who came forward with his neck and round arms bare, and a pitiless gleam in his eyes? The fact is that, as he had come there to satisfy society and without a shadow of perturbation, like a gentleman who is not fighting his first duel, and who knows the value of two good seconds, — his whole face suddenly changed, became earth-colored, and he displayed beneath his long beard the ghastly grimace of fear, with a sudden dropping of the jaw as if dislocated. Nevertheless, he retained his self-control and stood at guard bravely enough.

"Go on, messieurs."

Yes, everything is paid for. He had a secret consciousness of the fact, in face of that implacable point which sought him out, felt of him at a distance, seemed to spare him again and again only to strike home the more surely. His adversary meant to kill him, that was beyond doubt. And as he fought, his long, thin arm extended amid the clashing of hilts, he felt for the first time a twinge of remorse for his base desertion of his mistress, of the woman who had lifted him out of the mud and replaced him in society; a feeling too that that woman's just wrath was not unconnected with the pressing, enveloping danger which seemed to disturb the atmosphere all around him, which made everything whirl about and recede as in a dream, the boundless sky over his

head, the horrified faces of the seconds and the doctors, even the wild gestures of two stablemen driving away with their hats the capering horses who insisted on coming near and looking on. Suddenly loud, emphatic voices arose: "Enough! enough! Stop!" What has happened? — the danger has passed, the sky has resumed its immobility, other things their natural colors and positions. But at his feet, on the torn-up, trampled ground, is a large pool of blood blackening the yellow soil, and Paul Astier lying in it, his bare neck pierced from side to side, bleeding like a pig. In the dismayed silence following the catastrophe, the insects continue their shrill chirping in the distance, and the horses, with no eye upon them now, stand in a group a few rods away and protrude their muzzles inquisitively toward the motionless body of the vanquished. And yet he knew all the tricks of the sword. His fingers, firmly clasping the hilt, made the blade flash and soar and plunge and whistle, and seem to grow longer; while the other, facing him, wielded what seemed a timid, faltering skewer. How did it happen? The witnesses will say, and this evening the newspapers will say after them, and to-morrow all Paris will repeat with the newspapers, that Paul Astier slipped as he was making a thrust and spitted himself, all with great precision of detail; but, under ordinary circumstances, is not the precision of our words always in inverse ratio to our certainty? Even to those who were looking on and to those who

fought, there will always be something vague and confused about the decisive moment, the moment when fate took a hand, contrary to all anticipation, all logic, and dealt the last blow, hidden in the dark cloud in which the close of a Homeric combat is invariably shrouded.

Paul Astier was taken to a groom's diminutive quarters adjoining the stable; and when he reopened his eyes after a long swoon, the first thing that he saw from the iron bed on which he lay was a lithograph of the Prince Imperial pasted on the wall above the bureau, which was littered with surgical instruments; and as consciousness gradually returned with the sight of external objects, that poor, melancholy face with the pale eyes, faded by the dampness of the walls, that youth's sad fate depressed him like an omen of evil. But that ambitious, crafty nature did not lack courage. Painfully raising his head, embarrassed by the bandages in which it was swathed, he asked, in a hoarse and weak but still jesting voice, —

"Wound or prick, doctor?"

Gomès, who was preparing fresh bandages of disinfected muslin, imposed silence with an emphatic gesture.

"'A prick, lucky dog that you are! But it was a close shave. Aubouis and I thought that the carotid was open."

The young man recovered a little courage, his eyes sparkled. It is so pleasant not to die! His ambition returned all at once, and he insisted

on knowing how long it would be before he was cured, or convalescent.

"Three weeks, a month perhaps," according to the doctor, who answered carelessly, with a touch of disdain that was very amusing, but in reality greatly vexed, wounded himself in his patient's person. Paul, with his eyes on the wall, began to plan. D'Athis would be gone, Colette married before he could even leave his bed. That scheme had fallen through, he must find something else!

A great wave of light filled the hovel as the door was thrown open. Oh! the warm sunshine, and life! Védrine, entering the room with Freydet, approached the bed, joyfully holding out his hand.

"You gave us a fine fright!" he said. He was really fond of his little scamp, valuing him as an object of art.

"Yes, a fine fright," said the viscount, wiping his brow with an air of unspeakable relief. A moment earlier he had seen his chances of election, his academic hopes, dashed to the ground and lying in all that blood. Père Astier would never have taken the field for a man who had been concerned in such a disaster. And yet this Freydet was a good-hearted fellow, but the absorbing idea of his candidacy magnetized him like the needle of a compass; no matter how much he might be jostled or shaken in every direction, he always returned to the academic pole. And while the wounded man smiled at his friends, a little shamefaced none the less to be lying there

on his back, — he, the adroit and skilful fencer, — Freydet went into ecstasies over the delicacy of the seconds with whom they had just come to an understanding concerning the report to be made of the affair, the delicacy of Doctor Aubouis in offering to remain with his confrère, the delicacy of the prince in going away in the calèche and leaving for Paul Astier's use, to take him home, his own comfortable carriage, with one horse, which could be driven right to the door of the little house. Oh! it was all as delicately done as possible.

"How tiresome he is with his delicacy!" exclaimed Védrine, noticing the wry face which Paul could not restrain.

"A very extraordinary thing, on my word!" muttered the young man in the vague voice of one lost in thought. So it would be he, not the other, whose pale face would appear by the doctor's side, behind the glass of the coupé as it returned to Paris at a walk. Ah! how he had missed fire! Suddenly he sat up and, despite the doctor's injunctions, wrote hurriedly on one of his cards, with a poorly guided pencil: "Fate is as treacherous as men are. I tried to avenge you. I failed. Forgive me." He signed his name, read it over, reflected a moment, read it again, then, having sealed the envelope, a shocking country grocery envelope, adorned with flowers, which they found in the dust on the bureau, he wrote upon it "Duchesse Padovani," and begged Freydet to deliver it himself as soon as possible.

"It shall be done within an hour, my dear Paul."

He said "thanks — au revoir" with his hand, stretched out again, closed his eyes, and lay silent and motionless until the carriage came, listening to the incessant shrill buzzing of insects in the sun-flooded fields, a noise which seemed to him to be the first throbbing of fever, while behind his lower eyelids he followed the winding course of his new intrigue, so different from the last, and improvised with miraculous foresight, on the very ground, in the midst of defeat.

Was it really an improvisation? The ambitious youth might be in error as to that; for the motive of our acts often escapes us, being hidden, lost to sight in all the conflicting sentiments at work within us at critical moments, just as the plotter who has stirred the mob to action disappears in its midst. A human being is a mob. Made up like it of multifold, complicated elements, it has the same confused, illogical impulses; but the plotter is there, in the background; and however impulsive, spontaneous they may appear, our movements, like those of the mob, have always been prepared beforehand. Since the evening when Lavaux, on the terrace of the Padovani palace, had called Count Adriani's attention to the duchess, it had occurred to Paul Astier that, if Madame von Rosen failed him, there would still be the fair Antonia. He thought of it again the night before, when he saw Adriani in the duchess's box; but vaguely only, because his

efforts were being put forth elsewhere and he still believed in the possibility of victory. When the game was definitively lost, his first thought on returning to consciousness was: the duchess! Thus, almost without his knowledge, this improvised determination was the result of a slow, underground germination: "I tried to avenge you. I failed." There could be no doubt that, kind-hearted, quick-tempered, and revengeful as he knew her to be, she whom her fellow Corsicans called Mari' Anto, would be at his bedside the next day. It was for him to see to it that she left him no more.

As they returned to town in the landau, having left behind Samy's coupé, which was obliged to move slowly on account of the wounded man, Védrine and Freydet philosophized, sitting opposite the empty cushions on which lay the duellists' swords in their green serge scabbard.

"These sorry beasts don't go home so fast as they came," said Védrine, as he touched the swords with the toe of his boot.

Freydet reflected aloud: "To be sure, they fought with his swords;" and resuming his consequential, very solemn expression as a second, he added: "We gained everything; choice of ground and swords. A fencer of the first rank, too. As he says, it 's a very extraordinary thing."

They ceased talking for a moment, diverted by the splendor of the river, on which the setting sun was shining in sheets of greenish gold and

purple. Having crossed the bridge, the horses trotted rapidly along Rue de Boulogne.

"Yes," rejoined Védrine, as if their conversation had not been interrupted by a long pause; "with all his apparent success, the youngster is unlucky. Several times already I have seen him at odds with life, under circumstances which are touchstones, whereby one can judge of a man's destiny, for they make him sweat all the good luck he has under his skin. Well! no matter how he schemes and plans and thinks of everything, no matter how well he arranges his palette, at the last moment something gives way, and, while it does not demolish him altogether, prevents his getting what he wants. Why? Simply, it may be, because his nose is crooked. I give you my word, these deviations from the straight line are almost always symptoms of a false mind, of a tendency to go a little crooked. A bad *coup de barre*, eh?"

They laughed at that idea; then, continuing to converse upon the subject of good luck and bad luck, Védrine told of a singular incident that happened almost before his eyes, on the Padovani estate, while he was travelling in Corsica. It was at Barbicaglia, on the seashore, just opposite the Sanguinaires light. There was an old keeper at the lighthouse, a faithful servant, just on the eve of retiring with a pension. One night, while he was on duty, the old man fell asleep and slept five minutes, no more, with his leg stretched out so that it stopped the movement of the revolving

lantern which makes the light change color every minute. Now, at that very instant, that same night, the inspector-general, who was making his annual tour of inspection on a government despatch-boat, happened to be abreast of the Sanguinaires, was astonished to see a fixed light, ordered the boat stopped, investigated, found out what had happened, and the next day the cutter of the Department of Roads and Bridges brought a substitute keeper to the island, with notice of the poor old man's immediate discharge.

"I think," said Védrine, "that that was a rare example of bad luck; the conjunction of the inspector's glance and the keeper's nap in time and place."

With his customary free, calm wave of the hand he pointed, as they drove into Place de la Concorde, to a broad patch of dark green sky, dotted here and there with twinkling stars, in the background of the beautiful dying day.

A few moments later the landau turned into Rue de Poitiers, a short street, already dark, and stopped in front of the high, escutcheoned doorway of the Padovani palace. All the blinds were closed and there was a great chirping of birds among the trees in the garden. The duchess had gone to the country, to Mousseaux, for the season. Freydet hesitated, the great envelope in his hand. He had prepared himself to see the fair Antonia, to give her a moving account of the duel, perhaps to slip in a word concerning his impending candidacy. Now he did not know whether he

ought to leave the letter, or to carry it to Mousseaux himself, three or four days hence, when he returned to Clos-Jallanges. At last he decided to leave it, and said as he returned to the carriage, —

"Poor fellow! He told me so earnestly that it was important!"

"Of course," said Védrine, while the landau carried them along the quays, where yellow lights symmetrically arranged were beginning to glow, to keep their appointment for preparing a report of the duel. "Of course. I don't know what that letter says, but for him to endure the pain of writing it at that moment, it must be something very adroit, very subtle, a marvellous stroke of cunning. But there you are — very important — and the duchess has gone."

Gravely twisting the end of his nose between two fingers, he added, —

"Bad luck again, you see."

XI.

THE sword-thrust which nearly killed their son interrupted the private disputes of the Astiers. Shaken to the depths of his paternal entrails, Léonard softened toward his wife and forgave her; and as Madame Astier, being installed as Paul's nurse, did not come to Rue de Beaune for three weeks, except on flying visits, to obtain clean linen or change her dress, they avoided all danger of allusions and veiled and crafty reproaches upon which the quarrels of a husband and wife feed, even after pardon is granted and peace made. Then, when the boy was convalescent and had gone to Mousseaux in obedience to an urgent invitation from the duchess, the typical academic household was completely reconciled, restored at least to its normal temperature of *couche froide*, by its installation at the Institute, in the office and apartments of the late Loisillon, whose widow, being appointed manageress of the school at Écouen, had by her speedy departure enabled the new Perpetual to move in almost on the morrow of his election.

It took them but a short time to become settled in those apartments which they had for so long a time coveted, watched, studied, hoped for, and with whose slightest details and advantages of

location and arrangement they had long been familiar. To see the precision with which all the articles of furniture fitted into their places, you would have said that they were just returning from the country and falling back into the grooves they had made on the floor or in the panels. They made no attempt at embellishment; simply had the room scrubbed in which Loisillon died, and a new wall-paper on Villemain's former salon, which Léonard took for his study, in order to have silence and light from the courtyard, and close at hand a small annex, very high and light, for his autographs, which he had transported in three trips in a cab, with the assistance of Fage, the binder.

It was a new delight every morning to cast his eye over those "archives," almost as convenient as those at the Foreign Office, which he could enter without stooping, without having to climb a ladder, as to his kennel on Rue de Beaune, of which he never thought without anger and disgust, in obedience to man's natural impulse to hate the places where he has suffered, with a rancorous hatred which endures and never forgives. One may become reconciled to persons, who are likely to change, to present differing aspects, but not to things and their granite-like immutability. In the joy of moving, Astier-Réhu was able to forget his wrath, his wife's wrong-doing, even his grievances against Teyssèdre, who was permitted to come on Wednesdays, as before; but at the mere thought of the cage with the sloping roof to

which he used to be relegated one day in each week, the historian made his protruding jaw crack, became Crocodilus once more.

And it is inconceivable that that Teyssèdre should have been so cold, so unmoved by the honor of scrubbing at the Institute, at the Palais Mazarin, and that he should have continued to disarrange the perpetual secretary's table and papers and innumerable reports with the same tranquil arrogance as of yore, the arrogance of the citizen of Riom dealing with a vulgar "Chauvagnat." Astier-Réhu, whom that overwhelming disdain annoyed, although he would not admit it, tried sometimes to make the brute comprehend the majesty of the spot upon which he was using his wax.

"Teyssèdre," he said to him one day, "this used to be the great Villemain's salon. I commend it to your care;" and at the same time, to propitiate the haughty Auvergnat, he pusillanimously bade Corentine "give this good fellow a glass of wine."

The thunderstruck Corentine brought the glass, which the scrubber drank at a single gulp, leaning on his stick, his eyes dilated with joy; then he wiped his mouth with the back of his sleeve, and observed as he put down the empty glass, on which the marks of his lips could be seen: "You see, Meuchieu Achtier, there 's nothin' in this life so good as a glass of new wine."

His voice rang with such an accent of sincerity, he smacked his lips with such perfect content-

ment, that the perpetual secretary returned to his "archives" and slammed the door in a fit of impatience. For, after all, it was hardly worth while to have run about so much, to have started so low to attain such an eminence, the very apex of literary glory, historian of the House of Orléans, the keystone of the arch of the Académie Française, when a mere glass of new wine could afford a country bumpkin an equal amount of happiness. But a moment later, when he heard the scrubber remark sneeringly to Corentine "that he cared mighty little for Villemain's old salon," he shrugged his shoulders, and his momentary feeling of envy disappeared in face of such ignorance, gave place to profound and benignant compassion.

As for Madame Astier, who had been brought up and grown to womanhood at the Institute, who found souvenirs of her childhood on every paving-stone in the courtyard, on every step of the venerable, dusty staircase B, it seemed to her that she had finally returned home after a long absence; and how much more thoroughly than her husband did she appreciate the material advantages of the situation, no rent to pay, no fuel or lighting, — a very great saving for the receptions in winter, — to say nothing of the increased salary, the high connections, and the invaluable influence, especially useful to Paul and the quest for orders! When Madame Loisillon used to boast of the charms of her apartments at the Institute, she never failed to add with emphasis: "I have received even sovereigns here."

"Yes, in that little place," the excellent Adélaïde would retort sourly, straightening out her long neck. In fact, on the days of grand functions, long and fatiguing, it was by no means a rare occurrence, when the meeting was at an end, for some lady of exalted station, a royal princess on her travels, or a leader of society influential in the departments, to go up and pay a short visit, for some purpose of her own, to the perpetual secretary's wife. It was to hospitalities of that sort that Madame Loisillon owed her new post as manageress of a school, and Madame Astier would certainly be no less adroit than she in making the most of the "little place." A single circumstance disturbed her triumph for the moment — her personal quarrel with the duchess, which prevented her joining Paul at Mousseaux. But an invitation arrived opportunely from Clos-Jallanges, the proximity of the two châteaux enabling her to be nearer her son; and she hoped to win her way back by slow degrees to the favor of the fair Antonia, for whom all her former affection had returned when she saw how kind she was to her Paul.

Léonard, being detained at Paris by his duties, for Loisillon's work was several months behindhand, allowed his wife to go alone, promising to come later and pass a few days with their friends, although he was in reality firmly determined not to leave his dear Institute. He was so comfortable there, so at peace! Two meetings a week, to attend which he had only to cross the courtyard; summer meetings, select and familiar, with

only four or five members in attendance, nodding drowsily beneath the hot glass. The rest of the week his time was absolutely his own. The laborious old man took advantage of the opportunity to correct the proof of his *Galileo*, which was finished at last and ready to appear at the opening of the season. He weeded and pruned, made sure that there was nothing in it, no, nothing at all; he was also preparing a second edition of his *House of Orléans*, enriched with new, hitherto unpublished documents which doubled its value. The world is growing old; history — the memory of mankind, and as such subject to all the diseases, hiatuses, and infirmities of memory — needs more than ever to be supported by original documents, to be refreshed, to go back to the very sources of knowledge under pain of going astray or drivelling. And so, what a proud and pleasant task it was for Astier-Réhu, in those scorching August days, to read, on the clear, printed page, the copies of those documents, so authentic and so original, before returning them to the publisher, Petit-Séquard, with the title-page on which appeared for the first time, below his name, the words: "Perpetual Secretary of the Académie-Française," — a title to which his eyes were still unaccustomed, and which dazzled him whenever he glanced at it, like the courtyard gleaming white in the sunlight under his windows, the vast second courtyard of the Institute, majestic and conducive to meditation, — with naught to break the silence

save the occasional cry of a blackbird or a swallow, — and made solemn by a bronze bust of Minerva, and by its ten stone monuments in line against the wall, beyond which towered the huge chimney of the Mint close by.

About four o'clock, when the helmeted shadow of the bust began to lengthen, the stiff, nervous footsteps of old Jean Réhu could always be heard on the flags. He lived above the Astiers and went out regularly every day for a long walk, guarded, but at a respectful distance, by a servant whose arm he obstinately refused to take. He became more and more self-willed and deaf under the influence of the weather, which was intensely hot that summer, and his faculties showed signs of failing, especially his memory, which the pins in the lapel of his coat no longer served to guide; he became entangled in his stories, went astray in his reminiscences, like old Livingston in the bogs of Central Africa, stamping and splashing about until some one came to his assistance; and as that humiliated him, put him in an ugly temper, he hardly spoke at all to anybody, but soliloquized as he walked, marking with a sudden halt and a shake of the head the end of the anecdote and the inevitable "I saw that." Still erect, however, retaining as in the days of the Directory his taste for practical jokes, and taking keen delight in depriving of wine and meat, in prescribing the most diverse and most laughable diets for the multitude of crazy fools who wrote him every day to ascertain what hygienic system was re-

sponsible for his extraordinary reprieve. And while for some he prescribed vegetables, milk or cider, for others nothing but shell-fish, he denied himself nothing, drank freely at his meals, which were always followed by a nap, and, in the evening, by a smart quarter-deck promenade, which Léonard Astier could hear over his head.

Two months, August and September, had passed since the installation of the perpetual secretary; two months full of happy, fruitful content, marked by such a complete absence of ambition as he had never enjoyed in his long life. Madame Astier, who was still at Clos-Jallanges, talked of returning very soon; the Parisian sky was already turning slate-colored with the first fogs, a few academicians had returned to town, the meetings became less select, and during his working hours in Villemain's former salon Léonard Astier no longer needed to close his blinds against the blinding sunshine of the courtyard.

He was at his table one afternoon, writing to the worthy de Freydet some pleasant news concerning his candidacy, when the old cracked doorbell rang a violent peal. Corentine had gone out, so he opened the door himself, and was thunderstruck to find himself face to face with Baron Huchenard and Bos, the archivist-palæographer, who burst into the master's study with haggard face, his arms in the air, ejaculating beneath his red beard and bristling hair,—

"The letters are forged! I have proofs of it — proofs!"

Astier-Réhu, momentarily at a loss to understand, looked at the baron, who was looking at the ceiling; then, when he had succeeded in making out from the palæographist's howling that he denied the authenticity of the Charles the Fifths which Madame Astier had sold, and Bos had resold to Huchenard, he smiled very loftily and declared that he was ready to repurchase his three autographs, whose genuineness nothing, absolutely nothing could impair in his eyes.

"Allow me, Monsieur le Secrétaire Perpetuel, to call your attention —"

As he spoke, Baron Huchenard unbuttoned his waterproof coat and produced from a large envelope the three Charles the Fifths, absolutely unrecognizable, bleached, transformed from their former smoky hue to the most perfect white, and on each this water-mark, clearly legible in the centre of the page, beneath the emperor's signature, —

B B
ANGOULÊME
1836.

"Delpech the chemist, our learned confrère of the Academy of Sciences, assisted us —"

But these explanations produced simply a confused buzzing in poor Léonard's ears; he had suddenly become very pale, bloodless to the tips of his fat, hairy fingers, in which the three autograph letters trembled.

"The twenty thousand francs will be at your house this evening, Monsieur Bos," he gasped

finally, with the aid of what little saliva remained in his mouth.

"But Monsieur le Baron gave me twenty-two thousand," whined Bos, piteously.

"Twenty-two thousand, very well!" said Astier-Réhu, and mustered strength to show them out; but he detained his confrère of the Academy of Inscriptions in the dark reception-room, and in a most humble voice begged him, for the honor of the Institute, to say nothing concerning the unfortunate affair.

"Certainly not, my dear master — that is, on one condition."

"What is it? what is it?"

"You will soon receive notice of my candidacy for Loisillon's chair."

A warm grasp of the hand was the perpetual secretary's reply, and pledged him for himself and his friends.

Left to himself, the poor man sank into a chair before his table, covered with proofs, where the three false letters to Rabelais lay open. He stared stupidly at them and read mechanically: "Master Rabelais, you who have a refined and subtle mind —" The characters danced and whirled about in a sea of ink, decomposed in huge smooches of sulphate of iron which seemed to broaden and rise as he gazed, to extend to his whole collection, his ten, twelve thousand autograph documents, all, alas! procured from the same source. If those three were false, why, then his *Galileo*, his *House of Orléans*, the letter of

Catherine of Russia which he had bestowed upon the grand duke, and the one of Rotrou which he had presented to the Academy. And then — and then — With a superhuman effort of the will he stood up. Fage — he must see Fage at once!

His relations with the binder dated back several years, from a certain day when the little man had come to the archives of the Foreign Office to solicit the opinion and advice of the very illustrious and learned archivist concerning a letter from Marie de' Medici to Pope Urban VIII. in favor of Galileo. It happened that Petit-Sequard had just announced a *Galileo* by Astier-Réhu of the Académie-Française, in an entertaining series of historical monographs, published under the general title of *Scholarly Divertissements;* and so, after he had, with the aid of his long experience, ascertained and affirmed the genuineness of the manuscript, when the archivist learned that Fage also owned Pope Urban's reply, Galileo's letter of thanks to the queen, and many others, he suddenly conceived the idea of writing a fine historical work instead of his "bit of tomfoolery." But at the same time, impelled by the scruples of an honorable man concerning the origin of these documents, he looked the hunchback squarely in the eye, scrutinized, as carefully as if it were an autograph letter, that long, sallow face with the inflamed, blinking eyelids, and asked, cracking his jaw sternly: "Are these manuscripts yours, Monsieur Fage?"

"Oh! no, dear master." He, it seemed, was simply the agent of a certain aged maiden lady of noble birth, who was forced to sell, piece by piece, a very valuable collection which had been in her family since before Louis XVI. He had preferred to have nothing to do with the affair until he had taken the opinion of the most upright and illustrious of scholars; now, fortified by the master's sanction, he proposed to apply to the rich collectors, Baron Huchenard for instance.

Astier-Réhu interrupted him: "That is useless! bring me all you have concerning Galileo. I have a place for them."

People came in and seated themselves at the small tables; frequenters of the archives, burrowing investigators, the silent, pallid silhouettes of diggers in the catacombs, smelling of dampness, of lack of air, of exhumation.

"Come up in my study — not here," murmured the archivist in the huge ear of the hunchback, who followed him, gloved and perfumed, his hair combed over his forehead, with the haughty self-assurance not uncommon in persons with that deformity.

A genuine treasure was that Mesnil-Case collection, — Albin Fage disclosed the lady's name on the condition of absolute secrecy, — an inexhaustible treasure of documents of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, varied, interesting, throwing a new light on the past, sometimes overturning with a single word or a date accepted ideas concerning men and facts. Expensive as

they were, Léonard Astier did not allow one of these documents to escape him, for they almost always related to works which he had under way or in his mind. And he never conceived the shadow of a doubt of the little man's stories, the huge files of autographs still gathering dust in the loft of an old mansion at Ménilmontant. If, after some venomous observation from the prince of autographiles, his confidence felt the breath of suspicion, how could he yield to it in face of the binder's perfect *sang-froid* as he sat at his table or watered his vegetables in the peaceful atmosphere of the great green cloister, and especially in face of the perfectly natural explanation which he gave of the slips and erasures apparent on some of the sheets — the drenching with salt water to which the Mesnil-Case property was subjected when it was taken over to England at the time of the emigration? Reassured and comforted, Astier-Réhu would cross the courtyard with an alert step, always carrying away with him some new purchase in exchange for a check for five hundred, a thousand, or even two thousand francs, according to the historical importance of the document.

In reality, whatever he may have said to himself to put his conscience to sleep, the historian counted for less than the collector in this prodigal expenditure which no one about him suspected as yet. Dark and dismal as was the attic on Rue de Beaune where the business was ordinarily transacted, a shrewd observer could have made

no mistake. That falsely indifferent voice, those dry lips whispering, "Show it to me," the greedy trembling of the fingers, disclosed the pervading passion, soon to become a mania, the selfish, unyielding cancer which seizes upon and consumes the whole being to assist its abnormal development. Astier became the classic ferocious Harpagon, implacable to his family as well as to himself, crying poverty, riding on tramcars, while in two years a hundred and sixty thousand francs of his savings found their way furtively, drop by drop, into the hunchback's pocket; and to explain the little man's goings and comings to the satisfaction of Madame Astier, Corentine, and Teyssèdre, the academician gave him files of papers to be bound, which he carried away and brought back openly. Between themselves they used passwords, veiled allusions. Albin Fage would write on a postal card: "I have some new specimens to show you, sixteenth-century bindings in good condition and very rare. — Léonard Astier would hesitate: "Thanks, I need nothing now — some other time." — Another postal card: "Don't put yourself out, my dear master. I will look elsewhere." — To which the academician never failed to reply: "To-morrow morning, early. Bring the covers." — That was the cloud upon his joys as a collector; he must buy, always buy, under pain of seeing that miraculous collection pass into the hands of Bos, Huchenard, or other amateurs. Sometimes, when he thought of the day when money would be wanting, he

would tremble with lowering passion, and question the hunchback, whose impassive, self-assured face exasperated him. — "More than a hundred and sixty thousand francs in two years! And you say she still needs money! What sort of a life does your noblewoman lead, in God's name?" — At such times he longed for the old maid's death and the disappearance of the binder, or else a war, a Commune, a great social cataclysm which would swallow up the Mesnil-Case mine and its greedy exploiters.

And now the cataclysm was at hand; not the one that he had craved, for fate never has at hand exactly what we want, but a sudden, appalling catastrophe, in which his work, his name, his fortune, his renown, all that he was, all that he had, might go down. And the dealers in engravings no longer recognized their Astier-Réhu when they saw him striding toward the Cour des Comptes, with livid cheeks, talking loudly to himself, returning none of the salutations which he ordinarily invited from the shops and bookstalls on the quay. For he saw nothing, nobody. In fancy he held the hunchback by the throat, shook him by his fine cravat; and waving under his nose the Charles the Fifths, degraded by Delpech's manipulations, exclaimed, "Now what have you to say?"

When he arrived at Rue de Lille he opened the gate of badly jointed boards in the fence surrounding the palace, and having passed through, rang the bell again and again, impressed by the

lugubrious aspect of the ancient edifice, despoiled of its flowers and its greenery, the genuine crumbling, yawning ruin with its tangle of twisted ironwork and leafless creepers. He heard the sound of old shoes dragging across the cold courtyard. The concierge appeared, a stout woman, broom in hand, and said without opening the wicket: "You come for the binder; he 's not here any longer."

Père Fage had gone, moved out without leaving his address; she was just at work cleaning the rooms for his successor at the Cour des Comptes, he having resigned.

Astier-Réhu stammered something to keep himself in countenance; but a great whirring flock of rooks flew down into the courtyard and drowned his voice with their hoarse, doleful cries, which echoed under the arches.

"See! the rooks that belong to the hôtel Padovani," said the woman, waving her hand respectfully toward the plane-trees whose gray branches rose above the roofs opposite. "They come before the duchess this year, a sign that we shall have an early winter!"

He walked away, his heart filled with dismay.

XII.

ON the day following the performance at which she had chosen to show herself with a smiling face, despite the catastrophe that had befallen her, and to give the women of her social set one last lesson in good breeding, Duchesse Padovani had left Paris for Mousseaux, according to her custom at that season. There was no apparent change in her life. Her invitations had been issued for the season, and she did not recall them; but before the arrival of the first party, during the few days' solitude which she usually employed in overlooking the preparations for the reception of her guests, to the most trivial details, she did nothing but race madly, like a hunted, wounded beast, from end to end of the park that stretched along the sloping banks of the Loire as far as the eye could see, stopping for a moment benumbed with fatigue, then starting off anew under the spur of a paroxysm of pain. — "Coward! Coward! Cur!" — She vilified the absent one as if he were by her side, as if he were walking at the same feverish gait in that labyrinth of green paths which led down to the river in long and shady windings. No longer duchess nor worldling, her mask laid aside, a mere human being, she gave

free rein to her despair, less intense perhaps than her wrath; for her pride cried out within her louder than aught else, and the few tears that forced their way through her lashes did not flow, but gushed forth, flashed like sparks of fire. To be revenged, to be revenged! She tried to conceive some cruel means of satisfying her longing for revenge; at times she had an idea of sending one of her keepers, Bertoli or Salviato, to put a charge of buckshot in his head on the wedding-day. — But no! She must smite him herself, feel the joyous thrill of the vendetta tingling in her veins. — She envied the woman of the people who lies in wait for a man in a doorway, and empties a phial of vitriol in his face with a deluge of horrible words. — Oh! why did she know none of the foul invectives which afford so much relief, no scurrilous insult to hurl at the traitor and despicable wretch, whose hesitating expression and false, forced smile of their last meeting she had always before her? But the patrician had none of that billingsgate at her command, even in her Corsican Île Rousse patois, and when she had shrieked, "Coward! Coward! Cur!" her lovely mouth was distorted by impotent rage.

In the evening, after her solitary meal in the enormous banqueting-hall hung with antique leather gilded by the last beams of the sun, the wild beast's race for life began anew, in the gallery directly over the river so cunningly restored by Paul Astier, with the lacework of its arches and its two pretty little corbelled towers. Below,

the Loire, broad and smooth as a lake, lay like pure silver in the fading light, dotted here and there in the soft atmosphere with clumps of willows and the sand islets formed by the sluggish stream; but poor Mari' Anto did not look at the landscape when, exhausted by retracing the steps of her disappointment, she rested both elbows on the railing, her eyes lost in space. Her life seemed to her a trackless, desolate waste, and at an age when it is difficult to begin anew. Shrill voices came up from Mousseaux, a group of low houses on the river bank; a mooring-chain creaked in the cool evening air. How easy it would be, simply by putting a little more force into the discouraged movement with which she threw herself against the rail — But what would the world say? A woman at her age, of her rank, make way with herself like an abandoned grisette!

On the third day came Paul's note, and at the same time the newspapers with circumstantial reports of the duel. She had something like the joyous sensation of an embrace. So some one still cared for her, some one who had tried to avenge her at the risk of his life; and to her eyes that did not signify love, but simply grateful affection; the memory of the favors she had bestowed upon him and his, and perhaps also a feeling that he must atone for his mother's treacherous behavior. Noble boy, gallant boy! Had she been in Paris, she would have gone to him at once; but as her guests were beginning to arrive,

she could only write to him and send him her physician.

Arrivals succeeded one another from hour to hour, by way of Blois and by way of Onzain, Mousseaux being about the same distance from both stations; and the landau, the calèche, and two great breaks deposited at the steps in the court of honor, where bells were ringing incessantly, illustrious habitués of the salon on Rue de Poitiers, academicians and diplomats, the Count and Countess of Foder, the Brétignys, count and viscount, the latter secretary of embassy, M. and Madame Desminières, Laniboire the philosopher, who came to the château to write his report on the competition for the Montyon prizes for virtue, the young critic of Shelley, who was strongly backed by the Padovani salon, and Danjou, the handsome Danjou, all alone, without his wife, who had been invited, but who would have embarrassed him in carrying out the schemes he was concocting beneath the curls of a brand-new Breton wig. The regular routine of château life began at once as in former years. In the morning, calls or work in one's bedroom, breakfast, general assembling of the guests, and siestas; and when the heat had subsided, long drives through the woods, or water-parties in the flotilla of small boats moored at the end of the park. They lunched on an island, or went in a body to draw the nets, which were always well stocked and alive with fish, the keeper taking pains, on the eve of every expedition, to fill them full. On returning

to the chateau, the guests arrayed themselves in full dress for dinner, after which the men, having smoked their cigar in the billiard-room or the gallery, came to the marvellous salon, formerly Catherine de' Medici's "salle du conseil."

The tapestries on the walls told the story of Dido's passion, and her despair at the departure of the Trojan vessels; a curious, ironical parallel to the existing state of affairs, which no one noticed, however, by virtue of the lack of interest in external forms which is so general in society, and results less from imperfection of the eyes than from constant and exclusive preoccupation with one's self, with one's own demeanor and the effect produced. And yet the contrast was most striking between the tragic frenzy of the abandoned queen, her uplifted arms, tears streaming from her eyes as the tiny speck vanished on the horizon, and the smiling tranquillity with which the duchess presided over the meetings of her guests, retaining her sovereignty over the women present, whose toilets and whose reading she directed, taking part in Laniboire's discussions with the young critic, and in the disputes between Desminières and Danjou concerning the candidates for Loisillon's chair. In truth, if the Prince d'Athis could have seen her, — that traitor Samy who was in all their minds, but whom nobody mentioned, — his pride would have suffered to find how small a void his absence caused in that woman's life, and in that noisy, bustling, royal mansion of Mousseaux, where, from top to bottom of the long

façade, only three blinds remained closed, at the windows of what was called the prince's wing.

"She takes it well," said Danjou the first evening; and the little Countess of Foder, her pointed nose alert with curiosity amid a seductive mass of lace, and the sentimental Madame Desminières, all prepared for condolences and confidences, were amazed by such noble courage. In reality they were inclined to be angry with her for it, as for the abandonment of a long anticipated dramatic performance; while to the men this Ariadne-like serenity seemed an encouragement to apply for the succession. And that was the significant change in the duchess's life — the bearing of all, or almost all, the men toward her, a freer, more insistent bearing, a noticeable eagerness to please her, a strutting about her arm-chair which was aimed directly at the woman, and not, as before, at her influence.

To be sure, Maria-Antonia had never been more beautiful; her manner of entering the dining-room, the rich splendor of her complexion, of her shoulders in the light summer decollétée gown, lighted up the table around her, even when the Marquise de Roca-Nera was present, from her château across the Loire. The marchioness was the younger woman, but who would have suspected it from looking at them? Moreover, the fair Antonia owed to her lover's abrupt departure the unavowable charm, the mysterious devil's grip, the attraction of the warm spot to which so many men yield. Laniboire the philosopher,

appointed to report on the competition for the Montyon prizes, was violently assailed by that mysterious and devilish attraction; a widower of mature years, with purple cheeks and melancholy features, he attempted to subdue the châtelaine by a display of virile, sportive graces which resulted in several misadventures. One day, in a boat, when he essayed to handle the sculls with a great swelling of the biceps, he fell into the Loire; another time, when he was caracoling at the door of the landau, his horse jammed his leg so severely against the wheel that he had to keep his room and be bandaged for several days. But in the salon more than elsewhere it was a beautiful sight to see him "dancing before the ark," as Danjou described it; bending and unbending his long body, challenging to single combat in dialectics the young critic, a savage pessimist of twenty-three, whom the old philosopher overwhelmed with his imperturbable optimism. He had his own reasons for looking upon life as a goodly, aye, a most excellent thing, had Laniboire the philosopher, whose wife had died of an attack of quinsy, caught at the bedside of her children, both of whom were taken away with their mother; and in his dithyramb in praise of life, the good man always concluded the exposition of his doctrines by a sort of pictorial demonstration, a flattering wave of the hand toward the duchess's low-necked dress, as if to say: "Imagine looking upon life as an undesirable thing in presence of those shoulders!"

The young critic, for his part, paid his court in a more subtle fashion, by no means lacking in devilish ingenuity. Being a great admirer of the Prince d'Athis, and still at the ingenuous age which expresses admiration by imitation, he began, immediately upon entering society, to copy Samy's attitudes, his gait, even his way of moving his head, his bent back and his vague, inexpressive smile of disdainful silence; now he emphasized the resemblance with details of dress, which he had observed and remembered with childish exactness, from the manner of pinning the cravat where the neck begins to widen, to the tawny plaid of a pair of trousers of English cut. He had too much hair, unfortunately, and not a bristle of beard, so that his efforts were wasted, and there was an entire absence of any troublesome awakening of memories in the prince's former mistress, who was as indifferent to his English plaid as to the killing glances of the younger Brétigny, or the vigorous pressure of Brétigny père when she took his arm to go to the table. But it all helped to maintain about her the warm atmosphere of zealous and gallant attentions to which d'Athis had accustomed her for so long, playing his part of attentive lover even to fawning; and her woman's pride was less conscious of the pangs of desertion.

Among all these suitors, Danjou held himself aloof, amusing the duchess with his gossip of the wings, and making her laugh, which sometimes succeeds very well with some women. Then,

when he considered that she was sufficiently prepared, one morning when she was beginning her solitary walk through the park in company with the dogs, that frantic race in which she shook off her wrath in the thickets filled with the morning songs of birds, dipped it and cooled it in the dew of the lawns and the drops from the branches, he suddenly appeared at a bend in one of the avenues and tried his luck. In a full suit of white linen, his trousers tucked in his boots, a Basque cap on his head, and his face cleanly shaven, he was trying to decide upon the dénouement of a play in three acts which the Français wished him to furnish for the winter; the title was *Les Apparences*, a society subject, very severely treated. It was all written except the last scene.

"Well, let us decide together," she said gayly, snapping the long lash with a short handle and silver whistle, which she used to call her pack. But at the first step he began to talk of love, of the melancholy life she would lead all by herself, and finally offered himself squarely, cynically, *à la Danjou*. The duchess, drawing herself up with a proud, quick movement of the head, tightened her grasp on the handle of the little dog-whip, ready to lash the insolent wretch who dared to treat her like a ballet-dancer behind a wing at the opera. But the insult to her dignity was an act of homage to her beauty after all, and in the sudden flush that rose to her cheeks there was as much pleasure as indignation. He meanwhile

continued to press his suit, tried to dazzle her with his sparkling *mots*, affecting to treat the thing less as an affair of the heart than as an alliance of interests, a sort of cerebral partnership. A man like him! a woman like her! — Together they would hold the world in their hands.

"Many thanks, my dear Danjou; I know all about that beautiful reasoning. I am still weeping for it."

And without further reply, she pointed with a haughty gesture to one of the shady avenues.

"Go and decide about your dénouement; I am going back to the house."

He stood there, out of countenance, watching her walk away at her long, swinging gait, so tempting to the eye.

"Not even as zebra?" he asked plaintively.

She turned, her black eyebrows joined: "Ah! yes, to be sure. The post is vacant." — She was thinking of Lavaux, of that base subaltern for whom she had done so much. And she added, without a smile, in a tired voice: "As zebra if you choose." — Then she disappeared behind a clump of superb yellow roses, too full-blown, whose petals the first brisk breath would scatter.

It was a great point gained that the proud Mari' Anto had heard him to the end! Probably no man, not even her prince, had ever spoken to her in that tone. Full of hope and energy, excited by the fine tirades he had just improvised, the dramatist soon made up his mind as to his last scene. He was going to his room

to write it before breakfast, when he suddenly paused, surprised to see through the branches that the prince's windows were thrown wide open in the sunlight. For whom? What favored individual was to have the honor of occupying those luxurious and convenient quarters looking on the Loire and the park? He inquired and was reassured. The apartments were thrown open for Madame la Duchesse's architect, who had come to the château for his convalescence. The intimacy between the Astiers and the châtelaine being known, what more natural than that Paul should be received as the child of the family at Mousseaux, which was to some extent his own work. However, when the new guest took his seat at the breakfast table, his pleasing, refined face, made even paler by a white silk neckerchief, his duel, his wound, the halo of romance about the whole affair, seemed to make so deep an impression on the women, the duchess herself bestowed such marked and affectionate attentions upon him, that the handsome Danjou, one of those terrible gluttons to whom every rival success seems a wrong, almost a theft, felt something like a jealous stab. Availing himself of his post of honor, he began, with his eyes on his plate and in a low voice, to cry down the pretty young man, unfortunately so disfigured by his mother's nose; he sneered at his duel, his wound, at these fencing-school reputations which are burst by the merest prick at the first meeting. He added, unconscious how truly he spoke: "A mere sub-

terfuge their quarrel over cards, you know. It was about a woman."

"The duel? do you think so?"

He nodded, "I am sure of it!" and, delighted by his prodigious perspicacity, exerted himself to entertain the whole party, whom he fairly dazzled with *bons mots*, with which he was always well-stocked, like pocket fireworks. Paul Astier was not strong at that game; and the feminine sympathy speedily returned to the illustrious talker, especially when he had announced that he had decided upon the dénouement of his play, that it was finished, and that he would read it in the salon during the warmer hours of the day. Such a rare break in the monotony of the daily routine was welcomed by a unanimous exclamation of delight from the ladies; and what a boon to those privileged creatures, already bursting with pride in dating their letters at Mousseaux, to send their dear absent friends a description of an unpublished play by Danjou, read by Danjou himself, and to be able to say next winter when the rehearsals began: "Danjou's play? oh! yes. I am quite familiar with it; he read it to us at the château."

As they were leaving the table, still all aglow with the good news, the duchess walked up to Paul Astier and said, taking his arm in her charming if somewhat despotic way, —

"Let us take a turn in the gallery; it 's stifling here."

The air was heavy even at that height, to

which the Loire, lying below like a sheet of zinc, sent up puffs of vapor as from a hot vat, which veiled the green disorder of its banks and its half-submerged islets. She led the young man to the end of the last arch, far away from the men who were smoking, and said, pressing his hands: "So it was really I, it was for me —"

"For you, duchess." And he added, through his clenched teeth: "And the end is not yet; we will begin again."

"Will you please not say another word, wretched boy?"

She checked herself at the approach of a prowling, inquisitive footstep.

"Danjou!"

"Duchess?"

"Will you bring me my fan, which I left at my seat in the dining-room? thank you;" and when he had gone: "I forbid you, Paul; in the first place, such a miserable wretch is not worth fighting with. Ah! if we were alone, if I could tell you!"

There was in the lowering of her voice and the relaxation of her hands an intensity of emotion which surprised Paul Astier. After a full month he had hoped to find her more resigned. It was a disappointment which froze on his lips the irresistible "I love you, I have always loved you" which he held in readiness for their first interview after his arrival. He contented himself with describing the duel, in which she seemed deeply interested when the academician returned with her fan.

"Good zebra, Danjou," she said, by way of thanks.

The other pouted a little and replied in the same vein, in an undertone: "Yes, but with a promise of promotion, otherwise —"

"What! exacting already!"

She rebuked him with a light tap of her fan, and wishing to put him in good-humor for his reading, returned on his arm to the salon, where the manuscript was spread out on a dainty card-table placed directly in the light from a high window, partly open, which looked on the flowers and verdure, the dense, wooded background of the park.

"*Les Apparences*, play in three acts. *Dramatis Personæ.*"

All the women, seated in a circle as near as possible to the reader, felt the pleasant shivering sensation, the thrill due to the anticipation of enjoyment. Danjou read as one of Picheral's *cabotins* should read, took time to moisten his lips on the edge of his glass of water, wiped them with a fine cambric handkerchief, and at the end of each broad, long sheet smeared with his tiny handwriting, he let it fall negligently on the carpet at his feet. Each time, the Countess of Foder, the foreigner devoted to illustrious men, stooped noiselessly, picked up the fallen sheet, and placed it with veneration on a chair beside her, each in its proper place. A modest and delightful manœuvre, which brought her nearer to the master, gave her a share in his work, as if

Liszt or Rubinstein were at the piano and she were turning the leaves of the score. Everything went well up to the end of the first act; an entertaining, varied production, which was greeted by a delirium of little shrieks, ecstatic laughter, and enthusiastic bravos; then, after a long pause, during which one could hear in the depths of the park the buzzing, vibrating murmur of the insects among the trees, the reader wiped his moustache and continued, —

"Act II. The scene represents —" But his voice changed, faltered more and more at each passage. He had noticed an empty chair among the ladies in the front row, Antonia's chair, and his eyes sought her over his glasses through the great salon filled with green shrubs, and with screens of whose shelter the audience availed themselves to hear better or to sleep more comfortably. At last, in one of the frequent, regular intervals which his glass of water afforded him, he heard a whispering, caught the sheen of a light dress, and at the other end of the room the duchess appeared to him, beside Paul Astier, continuing the conversation he had interrupted in the gallery. To a child so spoiled by all his triumphs as Danjou, the insult was a stinging one. He had the courage, however, to go on with his act, flinging the sheets on the floor with such violence that they flew away, and poor little Foder had to crawl about on all fours to pick them up. At last, as the whispering continued, he ceased to read, alleging as an excuse a sudden hoarseness,

which compelled him to postpone the rest until the next day. And the duchess, absorbed by the duel, of which she seemed not to grow weary, thought that he had read the play through, and cried from afar, clapping her little hands: "Bravo, Danjou! the dénouement is very pretty!"

That evening the great man had, or pretended to have, an attack of liver complaint, and he left Mousseaux at daybreak, without a word to any one. Was it simply an author's pique? Did he really believe that young Astier was about to take the prince's place? However that may be, a week after his departure Paul's first word of love was still to be said. She showed the utmost consideration for him, was almost motherly in her attentions, inquired about his health, whether he did not find it too warm in the southern tower, whether the movement of the landau did not tire him, whether it was not bad for him to stay late on the river; but as soon as he attempted a word of love, she beat a hasty retreat without waiting to understand him. And yet it was a far cry from the proud Antonia of previous seasons to his hostess of to-day. The other, haughty and reserved, taught the indiscreet to know their place simply by knitting her brows; the feeling of security that a noble river has between its banks. Now the embankment was cracking and afforded a hint of a fissure through which the woman's real nature overflowed. She gave vent to outbursts of rebellion against the social customs and conventions formerly so respected by her, and a

restless longing to move from place to place, to wear herself out by unreasoning activity. Plans for *fêtes*, illuminations, grand stag-hunts for the autumn, which she would lead herself, although she had not ridden for years. The young man kept a close watch upon the outcroppings of this agitation, took note of everything with his sharp hawk's eye, being fully determined not to fritter away two years as he had done with Colette von Rosen.

The party had separated early one evening, after a tiresome day of driving and rowing. Paul had gone to his room, removed his coat and stiff shirt, and was sitting in his silk undershirt and slippers, with a good cigar in his mouth, writing to his mother, carefully selecting and weighing every word. It was necessary to convince mamma, now sojourning at Clos-Jallanges and wearing out her eyes by looking toward the towers of Mousseaux on the horizon, beyond the winding river, that there was at present no possibility of a reconciliation or even of an interview between her and her former friend. No indeed! the good woman was too meddlesome; he preferred to have her at a distance from his personal affairs. He must remind her also of the note maturing at the end of the month, and her promise to send the money to staunch little Stenne, who was left alone on Rue Fortuny to defend the Louis XII. edifice. If Samy's money had not come to hand, let her borrow from the Freydets, who would not refuse

to accommodate for a few days, as the morning papers of that very day announced in their foreign correspondence an ambassador's marriage at St. Petersburg, mentioning the presence of the grand duke, the bride's costume, and the name of the Polish bishop who performed the ceremony. And mamma could imagine whether the breakfast at Mousseaux had felt the effect of that news, which every one knew, which the mistress of the house could read in every eye and in the persistence with which her guests talked of other things. The poor duchess, after sitting silently throughout the meal, had felt, on leaving the table, notwithstanding the terrible heat, a frantic longing to escape from her thoughts, and had taken all her guests in three carriages to the château of La Poissonnière, where the poet Ronsard was born, — a drive of six leagues in the hot sun, in the blinding white dust, for the pleasure of hearing that horrible old Laniboire, mounted on a pedestal as weatherbeaten as himself, declaim, —

"Now go we, sweet, and see if yonder rose — "

Returning, they must pay a visit to the country orphanage founded by old Padovani — mamma was familiar with it no doubt — and inspect the dormitory, the laundry, the agricultural implements, the class-rooms; and the air was poisonous, and it was horribly hot, and Laniboire harangued the young farmers with their poor, galley-slave faces, assuring them that life was an excellent thing. To conclude, another exhausting halt at certain smelting-works near Onzain, an hour in the hot,

declining sun, in the smoke and smell of coal vomited forth by three enormous brick towers; stumbling over rails, dodging cars and steam shovels, filled with incandescent metal in huge blocks dropping fire, like blocks of red ice melting. And all the while the duchess, spurred on by her emotions, indefatigable, looked at nothing, heard nothing, as she walked about on the arm of the elder Brétigny, with whom she seemed to be engaged in earnest discussion of some subject as foreign to the forges and smelters as to Ronsard and the orphanage.

Paul had reached that point in his letter, exerting himself particularly, in order to lessen his mother's regrets, to describe life at Mousseaux that year as fearfully wearisome and monotonous, when there was a light tap at his door. He thought of the young critic, of Brétigny the younger, even of Laniboire, who had seemed intensely agitated for some time, — they often prolonged the evening in his room, which was the largest and most convenient in the house, with a cosy smoking-room attached, — and was greatly surprised, on opening the door, to see the long gallery on the first floor, in the light that shone through the stained glass windows, silent and empty from end to end, even to the massive door of the *salle des gardes*, whose carvings were clearly outlined by a moonbeam. He returned to his seat, but the knock was repeated. It came from the smoking-room, which was connected with the duchess's apartments by a small door

under the hangings and a narrow passageway cut through the thick wall of the tower. This arrangement, which was of much earlier date than the restoration of Mousseaux, was entirely unknown to him; and suddenly, as he recalled certain conversations in his room during the last few days, especially Laniboire's terribly salacious stories, the pretty gallant said to himself: "*Bigre!* suppose she heard us!"

When he had drawn the bolt, the duchess passed in front of him without a word, and said in a grave voice, laying on the table a package of papers yellow with age, which trembled nervously in her hand, —

"Advise me — you are my friend — I have no confidence in anybody but you."

No confidence in anybody but him; unhappy woman! And that glance, like the glance of a bird of prey, crafty and searching, did not warn her, as it ranged from the letter he had imprudently left open on the table, so that she might have read it, to her lovely, bare arms in the flowing lace *peignoir*, to the heavy braids twisted for the night.

"What does she want?" he thought. "What has she come here for?"

And she, absorbed by her wrath, by the seething eddy of hate that had been stifling her since the morning, gasped very low, in short sentences: "Some days before you came he sent Lavaux to me — yes, he had the effrontery to do that — to ask for his letters. Ah! I received him without

ceremony, in a fashion to take away any inclination to come again. His letters, bah! these are what he wanted."

She handed him the package, the history and docket of their liaison, the evidence of what that man had cost her, of what she had paid for him while she was drawing him out of the mire. "Oh! take them and look at them; it 's an interesting collection, I tell you." And while he turned over those curious documents, impregnated with her peculiar odor, but better adapted to the front window of Bos's shop, — conditional bills of sale from dealers in curiosities, jewellers in chambers, linen drapers, yacht-builders, dealers in sparkling Touraine wines, notes for a hundred thousand francs to famous courtesans long since dead, disappeared, or well married, receipts from butlers, club-waiters, — in a word, Parisian usury in every form, the rehabilitation of a rake, — Mari' Anto muttered savagely: "It cost more to restore that fine gentleman than to restore Mousseaux, you see. I have had these in a chiffonnier for years, because I keep everything; but God is my witness that I never intended to use them. Now I have changed my mind. He is rich, and I want my money; otherwise I will sue him. Am I not right?"

"A hundred times right — but —" He twisted the point of his tawny beard. — "Was n't Prince d'Athis under guardianship when he signed these notes?"

"Yes, yes, I know; Brétigny told me — for

when he found Lavaux could do nothing, he wrote to Brétigny to ask him to arbitrate between us. — Between academicians, eh?" She laughed contemptuously, a laugh that put the ambassador and the former minister of state on the same level as titled academicians; then she added in a burst of indignation: "Certainly I need not have paid them, but I preferred to have him cleaner when I took him — however, I have nothing to arbitrate. I did pay the money — let him pay it back; or else I take him into court and there is a scandal, and his name is smirched, and his title of ambassador of France at St. Petersburg. So long as I dishonor him, the miserable cur, my suit will be won."

"Upon my word!" said Paul Astier, placing the papers on the table so as to cover up the letter to mamma, which embarrassed him, "upon my word! to think that he should have left such proofs in your hands — such a shrewd man as he is!"

"He, shrewd?"

All that she did not say was expressed in the shrug of her shoulders. He continued in the same strain, amusing himself by exciting her, for one never knows how far a woman's rancorous frenzy will go: "Still, he is one of our best diplomatists."

"It was I who made him up for the part. He knows nothing of the trade except what I have taught him."

"Then the Bismarck legend —"

"That he never could look him in the face? Ha! ha! that's a good story. I should say he could n't! Why, one instinctively turns away when he speaks; his mouth is like the mouth of a sewer!"

She hid her face in her hands as if ashamed, repressing her sobs, exclaiming fiercely in a hoarse, broken voice: "Think of it! think of it! — twelve years of my life to such a man! And now he leaves me, he has no further use for me — and it is he, he, who has broken it off!" — Her pride rebelled at that idea, and she strode back and forth, between the broad, low bed hung with old-fashioned curtains and the luminous circle of the lamp, trying to divine the reasons for the rupture, asking herself aloud, "Why? why?" — Was it the equivocal nature of their relations? — but he knew well that that would soon end, that they would be married within a year. — Was it that little fool's fortune, her millions? — As if she too had not great wealth; and connections and sources of influence which La Sauvadon had not! — What was it, then? youth? She gave a savage laugh. — Ha! ha! poor little fool! little he cared for her youth!

"So I imagine," murmured Paul, smiling and moving nearer to her. That was the sore point; she dwelt upon it as if for the express purpose of causing herself pain. Young! young! — in heaven's name, does a woman's age depend on the almanac? Perhaps Monsieur l'Ambassadeur would find that he had made a mistake. — And impul-

sively, with both hands, she put aside her lace *peignoir* from her rounded breast, her firm, beautiful neck: "There," she exclaimed, "there is where women show their youth."

Ah! the sequel was not long delayed. Impetuous, cunning hands continued what she had begun; *peignoir*, buckles, everything gave way and flew about the room; she was seized, carried off, thrown upon the open sheets, a flame passed over her like a whirlwind, a sweet, powerful, irresistible sensation of which she had never dreamed before that day; something which enveloped her, overwhelmed her, relaxed its grasp only to seize her, embrace her, swallow her up again and again. Did she expect it when she came? Was it, as he was justified in thinking, what she had come for? No! A frenzy of wounded pride, the vertigo of rage, nausea, disgust, an utter laying aside of all precautions as on a night of shipwreck; but never anything vile or scheming about her.

Now she is on her feet once more, in full possession of her faculties, and doubts and questions herself. — She! That young man! — and so suddenly! It is enough to make her weep with shame. — He, on his knees, is whispering: "Remember that I love you — that I have always loved you!" And she feels once more those bewildering currents of flame rushing in waves from her hands through her whole being. But a bell rings in the distance, faint sounds begin to be audible in the morning air, and she tears herself

from him, makes her escape, agitated beyond measure, not even pausing to take away the instruments of her vengeance.

Vengeance! Vengeance on whom? vengeance for what? She had no hatred now in her heart; she loved. And love, genuine love, with its frenzy and its paroxysms, was so entirely new, so extraordinary to her, that at the first embrace she had innocently thought that she was dying. Thenceforth her agitation was allayed, she experienced a sort of delicious convalescence which changed her gait and her voice; she became another woman, one of those of whom the common people say, when they see them walking on their husband's arm, a little slowly and as if mellowed by happiness: "There 's a woman who has what she needs." The type is rarer than one would think, especially in "society." It was complicated in this instance by the necessity of keeping up appearances before her guests, by the duties of a hostess superintending the departures and arrivals, the installation of the second series, more numerous and less select than the first, including all the academic gentry: Duc de Courson-Launay, Prince and Princesse de Fitz-Roy, the de Circourls, the Huchenards, Moser and his daughter, M. and Madame Henry of the American legation. A difficult task to feed and entertain all those people, to blend those discordant elements. No one was more expert at it than she; but now it was a bore, downright labor. She would have liked not to move, to meditate on

her happiness, to confine her thoughts to the one engrossing idea; and she could devise nothing to amuse her guests save the invariable visit to the nets, to Ronsard's château, to the orphanage, always well content when her hand touched Paul's, when chance brought them together in carriage or boat.

In one of their wearisome excursions on the Loire, one day when the Mousseaux flotilla, with its silk awnings, its flags bearing the ducal arms in bright, glaring colors, had made a more extended trip than usual, Paul Astier, whose boat preceded his mistress's, was seated at the stern beside Laniboire, listening to the old academician's confidences. Having received permission to prolong his stay at Mousseaux until his report was finished, the old idiot actually believed that he was in a fair way to be accepted as Samy's successor, and, as always happens in such cases, he selected Paul as the confidant of his hopes, told him what he had said, what answer she had made, and this and that, concluding with a —

"Young man, what would you do in my place?"

A clear, resonant voice called over the water from the boat behind them,—

"Monsieur Astier!"

"Duchess?"

"Look yonder, among the reeds. It looks to me like Védrine."

And Védrine it was, with his wife and children, painting busily on an old flat-bottomed boat tied to the branch of an alder, beside a green islet

where quantities of wagtails were piping merrily. They pulled alongside at once, for anything is a welcome distraction to the constant ennui of people in society, and while the duchess bestowed her sweetest smile on Madame Védrine, whom she had entertained for some time at Mousseaux, the women gazed with curious interest at that artist's household, the lovely children born of love and life, sleeping peacefully in the shelter of that little verdure-clad inlet, upon that calm, clear stream which reflected the image of their happiness. Védrine, after the exchange of greetings, without putting aside his palette, gave Paul the news from Clos-Jallanges; they could see the long, low, white house, with its Italian roof, halfway up the hill in the mist from the river.

"My dear fellow, everybody in that house is mad! Loisillon's succession has turned them upside down. They pass all their time pointing their guns; all of them, your mother, Picheral, and the poor invalid in her wheeled chair. She has caught the academic fever too. She talks about going to Paris to live, giving parties and receptions to help on her brother's candidacy." He went on to say that he absented himself all day to avoid their madness, and worked out of doors with his family; and he added, pointing to his old scow, and laughing without a shade of bitterness: "My dahabiyeh, you see — my famous trip up the Nile!"

Suddenly the little boy, who had eyes for no one but Père Laniboire among all those people,

pretty women, and pretty dresses, asked him in a shrill voice: "Say, are you the academy gentleman who 's going to live a hundred years?"

The old reporter, who was intent upon making an impression on the fair Antonia as a boatman, came very near falling over the thwart; and when the wild laughter had somewhat subsided, Védrine explained the singular interest the child felt in Jean Réhu, whom he did not know, whom he had never seen, solely because of his approaching hundredth birthday. The pretty little fellow inquired about the old man every day, asked how he was; and he felt throughout his whole little being an almost selfish veneration for life, a hope that he too might live to be a hundred, as other people could do it.

But the wind was freshening, flapping the tiny sails and all the gleaming banners. A mass of clouds was coming up from the direction of Blois; and a sort of network of rain veiled the horizon toward Mousseaux, whose four lanterns at the top of the towers twinkled beneath the black sky. There was a moment of hasty movement, of scrambling to places. As the boats moved away between the banks of yellow sand, following one another in single file because of the narrowness of the channel, Védrine, interested by that blaze of color under the stormy sky, by the graceful figures of the boatmen standing in the bows and pushing with their long poles, — Védrine turned to his wife, who was on her knees in the bottom of the scow, bundling up the children and pack-

"'*Look at that, mamma*'"

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ing the box of paints and the palette: "Look at that, mamma. You know I sometimes say of a comrade that we are in the same boat; there is a very clear and lifelike representation of my metaphor; all those boats in single file rushing away into the wind, with night coming on, are the generations of art. It 's of no use for those in the same boat to feel ill at ease among themselves, for they know one another, touch elbows with one another; they are friends without knowing it, all sailing on the same tack. But how slow they are who go before, how they block the way! There is nothing in common between their boat and ours. We pay no attention to them except to call out: 'Go on, go ahead there!' while we shout angrily to the boat which follows us, presses close on our heels in the enthusiasm of youth, and would like to pass over our bodies: 'Gently there! What 's your hurry?' Well, for my part —" He drew up his tall figure and towered above the river and its banks. —"I belong to my own boat, to be sure, but those which go before and those which come behind interest me as deeply as my own. I hail them, I signal to them, I try to keep in touch with them all. For the same dangers threaten us all, the first and the last, and to all of our boats the currents are equally strong, the sky treacherous and the night so swift in coming! — Now let us be off, my darlings, here comes the shower."

XIII.

"PRAY for the repose of the soul of his most high and puissant lordship, Duc Charles-Henri-François Padovani, Prince d'Olmütz, some time senator, ambassador and minister, Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor, deceased on the 20th day of this month of September, 1886, at his estate at Barbicaglia, where his remains have been interred. A mass for the repose of his soul will be said on Sunday next in the chapel of the château; you are invited to be present."

Paul Astier, as he came down from his bedroom for the noonday breakfast, felt a thrill of joy, of unbounded pride, as he heard that strange proclamation, which was shouted along both banks of the Loire, from Mousseaux to Onzain, by employés of the firm of Vaffard, carrying heavy bells, which they rang as they walked along, and wearing tall hats bedecked with crêpe streamers falling to the ground. The news of the duke's death, which had happened four days before, had the effect at Mousseaux of a charge of shot falling among a covey of partridges; it put to flight all the guests of the second instalment, drove them to the seashore or to unexpected visits in the country, and compelled the duchess to start incon-

tinently for Corsica, leaving only a few intimate friends at the château. In spite of everything, the melancholy accent of those voices and perambulating bells, wafted by the Loire breezes through the gothic window on the staircase, and that invitation to the funeral mass, declaimed in regal fashion so entirely out of date, imparted to the fief of Mousseaux a surprising air of grandeur, and made its four towers and the tops of its centenary trees rise even higher than before. Now, as it was all to belong to him, as his mistress when she went away had begged him to remain at the château so that they might decide some very grave questions on her return, that funereal proclamation seemed to him equivalent to an announcement of his speedy entrance into possession. — "Pray for the repose of the soul." — At last he had wealth within his grasp, and this time he would not let it be snatched away from him — "some time senator, ambassador and minister."

"Those bells are dismal enough, are n't they, Monsieur Paul?" said Mademoiselle Moser, who was already at the table between her father and Laniboire the academician. The duchess had kept them at Mousseaux, partly to divert Paul Astier in his loneliness, and partly to afford a little more rest and fresh air to the poor Antigone, enslaved by her father's perpetual candidacy. From her, at least, there was nothing to fear in the way of rivalry, with her eyes like a whipped dog's, her colorless hair and her entire absorption in the single humiliating duty of soliciting that

impossible academic chair. On this morning, however, she had paid more attention than usual to her appearance; she wore a new dress, cut heart-shaped at the neck. The neck which that heart-shaped opening disclosed seemed very lean and pitiful, but still, a bird in the hand — And Laniboire, in his element, ogled her and said many things. He did not consider those death-bells dismal, nor the "Pray for the repose" — which they could hear at intervals in the distance. On the contrary, life seemed brighter to him by contrast, the Vouvray wine assumed a more golden hue in the decanters, and his salacious stories echoed strangely in the too immense dining-hall. Moser the candidate, pulpy of face and amiable of expression, laughed a courtier-like laugh, although a little embarrassed by his daughter; but the philosopher was an influential man in the Academy!

After they had taken their coffee on the terrace, Laniboire, with cheeks of the brilliant hue of an Apache Indian's, exclaimed: "Let us go and work, Mademoiselle Moser, I feel just in the mood. I think I shall finish my report to-day." — Mild little La Moser, who sometimes acted as his secretary, rose a little regretfully. In that lovely weather, when the air was veiled by the first haze of autumn, she would have preferred a long walk, or perhaps to continue in the gallery her conversation with M. Paul, he was such an attractive, well-bred fellow, rather than write at Père Laniboire's dictation a eulogy of some de-

voted old maid-servant or model nurse. But her father urged her: "Go, go, my child; the master calls you." — She obeyed and went upstairs behind the philosopher, followed by old Moser, who was going to take his afternoon nap.

What happened then? What drama was enacted in the apartment occupied by Laniboire, who, if he had Pascal's nose, did not imitate his reserve? On returning from a long walk through the woods, intended to tranquillize his ambitious impatience, Paul Astier saw the large break at the foot of the steps in the court of honor, the two powerful horses pawing the ground, and Mademoiselle Moser already seated amid hand-bags and valises, while old Moser stood on the stoop, in utter bewilderment, feeling in his pockets and distributing *pourboires* to two or three sneering footmen. Paul walked to the break: "Are you leaving us, mademoiselle?" She held out her hand, — a long hand moist with cold perspiration, which she had forgotten to glove; and without replying, without taking from her eyes the handkerchief with which she was wiping them under her veil, she moved her head in sign of farewell, sobbing bitterly. He learned nothing more from Père Moser, who, with one foot on the step, sputtered in an undertone, angry and distressed at the same time: "It 's her doing — she insists on going away — she says that he failed to show her proper respect — but I can't believe it." He added with a profound sigh, his great wrinkle, the academic wrinkle, deep and red as a sabre-

cut in the centre of his forehead: "It's most unfortunate for my election!"

At dinner, Laniboire, who had remained in his room all the afternoon, asked as he took his seat opposite Paul: "Do you know why our friends the Mosers left us so abruptly?"

"No, dear master; do you?"

"Strange! strange!"

He affected a perfectly calm demeanor, lest the servants might be informed of the episode, but it was evident that he was disturbed, anxious, in the state of mind of the old libertine who, when his fever has abated, has naught left but the results of his villany. He gradually recovered his assurance, became reconciled with life, which he could not vilify at table, and concluded by admitting to his young friend that he had gone a little too far with the dear child; "but her father eggs me on, forces her on me. It makes no difference if one is chosen to report on the competition for the prizes for virtue, damnation!" He waved his glass with a killing air, which the other stopped short by asking, —

"What about the duchess? Mademoiselle Moser is certain to write to her to complain, or at least to explain her departure."

Laniboire turned pale. "Do you think so?"

Paul insisted, in order to rid himself of the dismal bore. Even if the girl said nothing, some servant might betray him. And he added, dilating the nostrils in his wicked little nose: "If I were in your place, my dear master —"

"Pshaw! let me alone; I shall get out of it with a scene which will advance my own interests. Women are like us, such episodes excite them!"

He feigned courage; but on the eve of the duchess's return, he talked about the elections to the Academy being so near at hand, about the damp evenings, which were very bad for his rheumatism, and decamped, carrying in his valise the famous report, finished at last.

She arrived in time for the mass on Sunday, which was celebrated with great pomp in the Renaissance chapel, where Védrine, with his multifold, artistic genius, had succeeded in restoring the beautiful glass-work and the wonderfully carved altar-piece. An enormous crowd from the neighboring villages, arrayed in hideous coats, long, shiny blue blouses, white headgear, neckerchiefs stiff with starch against sunburned faces, filled the chapel and overflowed into the court of honor; they had come, not for the religious ceremony nor to do homage to the old duke, who was a stranger in the country, but for the open air banquet which was to follow the mass, on the long tables arranged on both sides of the endless seignorial avenue, at which, when the service was at an end, two to three thousand peasants could easily find room. These forest folk with crêpe on their caps were a little embarrassed at first, awed by all the servants in mourning bustling about; they talked in low tones, in the shade of the majestic elms; but later, when their

blood was warmed by food and wine, the funeral repast became more animated, a scene of uproarious merry-making.

To avoid that disgusting exhibition of gluttony, the duchess and Paul Astier drove together through the country roads, deserted on Sunday, in an open landau draped with black. The tall lackeys with cockades, the long widow's-weeds opposite him, reminded the young man of other similar excursions.

"Upon my word," he thought, "there 's always a dead man in my affairs;" and his mind dwelt regretfully for a moment on Colette von Rosen's little face surrounded with short curls, which formed such a pleasing contrast to all her black garments. Although fatigued by travelling and looking somewhat stouter in her improvised mourning, the duchess had in her favor the grand manners which the other absolutely lacked; and then her dead man was not at all embarrassing, for she was much too honest to affect the appearances of grief which most women consider obligatory, even when they have detested their husbands and deceived them in every way. Beneath the echoing hoof-beats of the horses the road flew by, ascending and descending gently, now through little forests of oak, now between broad fields across which swept flocks of crows to hover around the wind-mills planted here and there. A pallid sunbeam filtered through the rare rifts in the soft, low-hanging, rainy sky; and the same fur robe covered them both and protected them from the

wind, while she talked of her Corsica, and of a wonderful *vocero* extemporized for the funeral by her maid.

"Matea?"

"Yes, Matea. She is a great poet, if you please."—And she quoted a few of the *voceratrice's* verses in the dignified Corsican patois, which was well suited to her contralto. But not a word as to the grave questions to be decided.

But those questions were what interested him, and much more deeply than the maid's poetry. She was waiting till evening, no doubt. And he entertained her by telling her in an undertone of Laniboire's adventure and of the shrewd fashion in which he had gotten rid of the academician.

"Poor little Moser!" said the duchess, with a laugh; "her father really must be chosen this time. She has well earned it."

Thereafter they exchanged only a few short phrases, sitting close together in the cradle-like motion of the landau, while the daylight faded over the darkened fields, until they could see in the direction of the ironworks intermittent tongues of flame flashing as high as heaven. Their return was unpleasantly marred by the drunken shouts and singing of the peasant groups returning from the merry-making, entangling themselves in the wheels like cattle, and wallowing in the ditches on both sides of the road, from which arose loud snoring and other disgusting noises,—their way of praying for the repose of the high and puissant nobleman's soul.

After dinner, during their usual walk in the gallery, she leaned against his shoulder, looking out into the night between the heavy columns that framed the indistinct horizon, and murmured: "How lovely it is! just we two — alone," but did not say what Paul was waiting to hear. He tried to bring her to it, and standing very close, his lips in her hair, he asked her about her plans for the winter. Did she intend to return to Paris? Oh! no, certainly not; Paris and its false-tongued society, all masks and treachery, made her sick at heart. But she was still in doubt as to whether she should seclude herself at Mousseaux, or set out for a long tour in Syria and Palestine. What did he think of it? Surely those were serious questions for them to decide together; in reality it was a mere pretext to detain him, for she was terrified at the thought that, if he returned to Paris, away from her, other women would rob her of him. Paul, considering that she was playing with him, bit his lips. — "Aha! so that 's your game, my girl. Very good; we will see." — Tired out by her journey and by her day in the open air, she retired early, dragging her feet along, after a significant handshake, to which the usual reply was a stealthy, tender "Good-bye for a moment." — She would come; he would be there, behind the door, listening for her footsteps. And what a glorious revenge then for the constraint of the day! A whole night of bliss in the whispered words: "Good-bye for a moment." But Paul Astier did not say those

words that evening; and, despite her disappointment, she saw in his self-restraint a token of respect for her recent bereavement, for the chapel still draped in black; she even concluded, as she fell asleep, that it showed great delicacy of feeling.

The next day they hardly met; the duchess was very busy, settling accounts with her steward and her farmers, to the great admiration of Maître Gobineau, the notary, who said to Paul at breakfast, with a malicious curl in every wrinkle of his weatherbeaten old face: "There 's a lady who will not allow herself to be bamboozled."

"What does he know about it?" thought the young hunter lying in ambush, as he stroked his light beard. However, the sharp, self-assured tone which that rich low contralto assumed in discussing matters of business warned him that he must play his cards very carefully.

After breakfast boxes arrived from Paris, with Spricht's forewoman and two assistants. At last, about four o'clock, she appeared in a marvellous costume which made her very young and slender, and suggested to him that they take a walk in the park. They walked side by side at the same quick pace, choosing the deserted paths, avoiding the long rakes with which the gardeners contended with the showers of dying leaves three times a day. But their efforts were unavailing, and within an hour the roads were covered anew with that rich-hued, Oriental carpet, purple, green, and reddish-brown, which rustled beneath

their feet in the slanting rays of a very mild sun. She talked to him of the husband at whose hands she had suffered so much in the years of her youth, determined to make him understand that she wore mourning solely to satisfy the requirements of society, and that it betokened no heart-sadness. Paul understood perfectly and smiled, being firmly resolved upon his policy of maintaining a cool demeanor.

At the farther end of the park they sat down near a summer-house masked by maples and privets, in which the fish-nets and the oars of the little flotilla were housed. From there they could see the sloping lawns, the high and low trees lighted up and gilded in spots, affording glimpses of the château which seemed magnified, resorted to the domain of history, rearing proudly aloft its lantern-capped towers, most of the windows being closed and the terraces deserted.

"What a pity to leave all this!" he said with a sigh. She looked at him in stupefaction, with an ominous contraction of the brow. — Go, he intended to go — and why, pray?

"Life, alas! we must — "

"Part! — and what of me? and the long journey we were to take together?"

"I allowed you to talk about it — "

But could a poor artist like him afford to travel in Palestine? Mere dreams, impossible of realization — Védrine's dahabiyeh, a mudscow on the Loire.

She shrugged her shapely, patrician shoulders.

"Nonsense, Paul; what childish folly! Is n't all that I have yours?"

"By what title?"

The secret was out! but even then she did not guess at what he was aiming. And he, fearing that he had moved too fast, continued, —

"Yes, what title, in the world's narrow judgment, have I to travel with you?"

"Very well; let us stay at Mousseaux."

He bowed with gentle irony, —

"There is nothing more for your architect to do here."

"Bah! we can find work enough for him — even if I have to set fire to the château to-night."

She laughed her musical, passionate laugh, pressed close to his side, took his hands and rubbed them against her face, said all sorts of foolish things, but not the words which Paul awaited, which he tried to make her say. — Thereupon he burst forth, vehemently, —

"If you love me, Maria-Antonia, let me go; I have to make a living for myself and those who belong to me. The world would never forgive me for allowing myself to be supported by a woman who is not and never will be my wife."

She understood and closed her eyes as if she stood on the brink of a precipice; in the profound silence which followed, they could hear the leaves falling all over the park in the gentle breeze, some still heavy with sap, slipping from branch to branch, others furtive and impalpable, like the rustling of a dress; and all around the

summer-house, under the maples, there was a sound like stealthy footsteps, as if a silent multitude were prowling about. She rose, shivering: "It is cold; let us go in." — Her sacrifice was made. She would die of it, no doubt, but the world would never see the Duchesse Padovani lowering herself to marry her architect, to become Madame Paul Astier.

Paul passed the evening openly making preparations for departure, gave orders about his trunks, distributed princely *pourboires* among the servants, inquired about the hours of trains, talking freely all the time, but could not succeed in disturbing the fair Antonia's moody silence, absorbed as she was in reading a review of which she did not turn a page. Not until he bade her good-night and thanked her for her generous hospitality to him for so long, did he see in the light of the great lace lamp-shade the look of agony in that proud face, the beseeching glance in those eyes, as piteous as a dying fawn's.

When he reached his room, the young man made sure that the smoking-room door was locked, extinguished all the lights and waited, sitting motionless on the couch near the little door. If she did not come, he had made a mistake and had it all to do again. But he heard a slight sound, the silk *peignoir* rustling in the secret passage, and after she had recovered from her surprise in not being admitted at once, a gentle tap, a mere touch with the ends of the fingers rather than a knock. He did not stir, he

even resisted a significant cough, and heard her walk away at last with a nervous, jerky step.

"Now," he thought, "she is caught. I can do what I please with her." And he went tranquilly to bed.

"If I were the Prince d'Athis, would you have become my wife at the expiration of your mourning? And yet d'Athis did not love you, and Paul Astier does love you, and is so proud of his love that he would have liked to proclaim it before the world, instead of concealing it as something to be ashamed of. Ah! Mari' Anto! Mari' Anto! what a lovely dream I have dreamed! Adieu forever!"

She read this letter when her eyes, inflamed with the tears she had shed during the night, were hardly open. — "Has Monsieur Astier gone?" — The maid, who was leaning out to fasten the blinds, saw the carriage containing M. Paul at the end of the avenue, too far away to be recalled. The duchess leaped out of bed and ran to the clock. Nine o'clock. The express did not leave Onzain until ten. — "A messenger, quickly — Bertoli — the fastest horse!" By taking a short cut through the woods he could arrive before the carriage. While her orders were being executed, she wrote, standing at her desk, almost undressed: "Come back; everything shall be as you wish." — No, that was too cold. He would not come for so little. She destroyed that note and wrote another: "Your wife, your mistress, whatever

you please, but yours! — yours!" — and signed: "Duchesse Padovani." — Then, frantic at the thought that even that might not bring him: "I will go myself; give me my habit, quick!"

And she called to Bertoli, whose horse was pawing the ground in front of the state entrance, to saddle "Mademoiselle Oger" for her.

She had not ridden for five years. The habit was too small for her amplified figure; buttons were missing. — "Never mind, Matea, never mind." — She ran downstairs with the skirt over her arm, between the rows of stupefied, vacant-faced footmen, and galloped away down the avenue. The gate, the road. Now she is in the woods, flying along the cool, grass-grown roads, long avenues, where birds and beasts take fright at her mad pace. She wants him, she must have him; the man, the lover, who has the power to make her feel the joys of death and of being born again! Now that she knows what love is, is there anything else on earth? — And she leans forward, watching for the train, for the whistle that wakes the echoes of the countryside. If only she arrives in time! — Poor fool! Though she were to go at a foot pace she would overtake him none the less, for that fleeing dandy is her evil destiny, the destiny that one cannot escape.

XIV.

To Mademoiselle Germaine de Freydet, Villa Beau-séjour, Paris-Passy.

CAFÉ D'ORSAY, eleven o'clock.
Breakfasting.

EVERY two hours, oftener if I can, I will send you a blue despatch, not only to allay your suffering, my darling sister, but for the joy of being with you in spirit throughout this great day, which will end, I trust, with a bulletin of victory, notwithstanding the defections of the last moment. Here is a remark of Laniboire's which Picheral repeated to me just now: "We enter the Academy with the sword at the side, not in the hand." An allusion to the Astier duel. I was not one of the participants, but the beast thinks much more of his joke than of the promise he made me. Nor can I rely on Danjou. After saying to me so many times, "Be one of us," he came to me this morning at the secretary's office and whispered, "Make yourself popular," which is perhaps the brightest remark he ever made. No matter! I am sure of success. My rivals are not to be feared. Baron Huchenard, the author of the *Cave-Dwellers*, in the Académie-Française! Why, all Paris would rise in its wrath. As for M. Dalzon, I consider him very

presumptuous. I have a copy of his book, his famous book, in my hands. I hesitate to use it, but let him beware!

Noon.

I am at the Institute, in my dear master's apartments, where I shall await the result of the ballot. Is it a mere fancy, I wonder? It seems to me that my arrival, although I sent up my name, created some confusion here. Our friends were finishing their breakfast. I heard a great deal of moving around and doors slamming, and Corentine, instead of showing me into the salon, hurried me into the archives, where my master joined me, apparently much embarrassed; he talked in undertones, urged me to keep perfectly quiet, and seemed so sad! Had he any bad news? — "No, no, my dear child," and we shook hands. "Keep up a brave heart." — For some time past the poor man has seemed different. One has a feeling that he is overflowing with some secret grief, with tears which he forces back. Some deep-seated, private chagrin in which my candidacy has no part; but in my present frame of mind —

Another hour of suspense. I am amusing myself by staring across the courtyard through the great bow-window of the hall in which the meetings are held, at the rows of academicians' busts. Is it a presage?

Quarter to one.

I just saw all my judges file into the hall — thirty-seven, if I counted aright; a full meeting

of the Academy, since Épinchard is at Nice, Ripault-Babin in his bed, and Loisillon in Père-Lachaise. It was a superb spectacle, all those illustrious men taking their places as a court! the younger men walking slowly, grave of mien, their heads bent as if beneath the burden of a too heavy responsibility, the older men erect and active; some gouty or rheumatic subjects like Courson-Launay had ridden in their carriages to the foot of the steps and were leaning on a confrère's arm. They waited before going upstairs, talking in little groups, with movements of the back and shoulders, and abundant gestures. What would I not give to have overheard that last discussion of my chances! I opened the window softly; but just then a cab laden with trunks drove noisily into the courtyard, and a traveller in a fur coat and otter-skin cap alighted. Épinchard, my dear, Épinchard, come all the way from Nice expressly to give me his vote. Brave heart! Then my master passed in his broad-brimmed hat, old and bent, turning the leaves of the copy of *Toute-Nue*, which I decided to hand him for use in an emergency. What would you have? a man must defend himself!

I can see nothing now except two waiting cabs and the bust of Minerva on sentry-go. Protect me, O goddess! Up yonder the roll-call is in progress and the preliminary interrogatory, each academician being required to assure the director that his vote is not promised. A mere formality, as you can imagine, the answers being given with

a negative smile and a little wagging of the head like a Chinese image.

A most extraordinary thing has happened. I had just given my despatch to Corentine and was standing at the window, trying to read on the gloomy façade opposite the secret of my destiny, when I saw, at the window next to mine, Baron Huchenard, taking a breath of fresh air like myself and almost touching me! Huchenard, my rival, Astier-Réhu's worst enemy, apparently at home in his study! Equally embarrassed, we bowed to each other, then retired at the same moment. But he is there. I can hear him, feel him behind the partition. It is perfectly certain that he is awaiting, as I am, the decision of the Academy, only he is at large in Villemain's former salon, while I am stifling in this hole littered with old papers. Now I can understand the confusion caused by my arrival — but what does it mean? how does it happen? Dear sister, my brain is in a whirl! Which of us two is being made a fool of in this house?

Treachery and disaster! a despicable academic intrigue, which I cannot solve as yet!

FIRST BALLOT:

Baron Huchenard	17 votes
Dalzon	15 "
Vicomte de Freydet	5 "
Moser	1 "

SECOND BALLOT:

Baron Huchenard	19 votes
Dalzon	15 "
Vicomte de Freydet	3 "
Moser	1 "

THIRD BALLOT:

Baron Huchenard	33 votes
Dalzon	4 "
Vicomte de Freydet	0 " (!!)
Moser	1 "

Evidently the copy of *Toute-Nue* was handed around between the second and third ballots, to the profit of Baron Huchenard. What is the explanation? I propose to have it; I will demand it; I will not leave this place until it is given me.

Half-past two.

You can imagine my emotion, dear sister, when, after hearing M. and Madame Astier, old Réhu and a crowd of visitors, congratulate and compliment the author of the *Cave-Dwellers*, I saw the door of the archives open, and my master came toward me with outstretched hands. "Forgive me, my dear child," — he was suffocating with the heat and emotion — "forgive me; that man held me by the throat — I had — I had — I thought to avert the great disaster that threatened me, but no man can escape aught that is written, even at the price of a dastardly act." He opened

his arms and I threw myself into them without anger, without any very clear understanding of the mysterious trouble which afflicted him.

After all, everything will soon be set right as far as I am concerned. I have most encouraging news from Ripault-Babin: it is doubtful if he lives through the week. One more campaign, my dear sister. Unluckily, the Padovani salon will be closed all winter by the duke's death. We have left for our manœuvres the reception days of Mesdames Astier and Ancelin, and of Madame Eviza, whose Mondays received a decided impetus from the grand-duke. But first of all, dear sister, we shall have to move again. Passy is too far away, the Academy won't come there. You will say that I am going to upset your life again, but it is so important! Look at Huchenard — no other title to the chair than his receptions. I am to dine with my dear master, so do not wait for me.

Your loving brother,

ABEL DE FREYDET.

Moser's one vote, on all the ballots, was cast by Laniboire, the reporter on the Montyon prizes. There is an anecdote on that subject — such a racy anecdote! However, it's all the same under the dome. What a farce!

XV.

"It is an abomination!"

"We must reply. The Academy cannot rest under the aspersion —"

"Do you mean it? On the contrary, the Academy owes it to itself —"

"Messieurs, messieurs, the real sentiment of the Academy —"

In the room used for their private meetings, the Immortals, standing in front of the huge mantel surmounted by the full-length portrait of Cardinal de Richelieu, were consulting before beginning their session. The cold, smoky light of a Parisian winter's day, entering through the skylight, emphasized the glacial solemnity of all the marble busts aligned against the walls; and the vast fireplace, almost as red as a cardinal's gown, failed to warm that sort of miniature parliament, half-court, with its green leather chairs, its long semicircular table in front of the president's desk, and the apparitor guarding the door not far from Picheral, the secretary.

Ordinarily, that is the pleasantest part of the meeting, that quarter of an hour's grace allotted the tardy members, which their confrères pass in gossiping in undertones, standing about in little groups, with their backs to the fire and their

coat-tails raised. But to-day the talk was more general and assumed the tone of a most vehement public discussion, in which the new arrivals took part from the other end of the room as they signed the roll. Some of them, indeed, before entering the hall, while they were putting off their fur coats, their mufflers and overshoes in the rooms of the Academy of Sciences, opened the door to cry infamy and abomination.

The cause of all this excitement was this: the reproduction in a morning paper of an exceedingly impertinent report of the Academy at Florence on Astier-Réhu's *Galileo* and the manifestly apocryphal and farcical (*sic*) documents which accompanied it. This report, which had been communicated in most mysterious fashion to the director of the Académie Française, had kept the Institute in a ferment for several days, feverishly awaiting the rejoinder of Astier-Réhu, who contented himself with saying: "I know — I know — I am doing what is necessary." And lo and behold! that report, which they thought that they alone knew of, was paraded that morning on the first page of the newspaper with the largest circulation in Paris, accompanied by insulting comments upon the Perpetual Secretary and the whole society.

Thereupon there was tremendous excitement, frantic, quivering rage against the impudent journalist and the stupidity of Astier-Réhu, to whom they owed these attacks of a sort to which they had been long unaccustomed, ever since the

Academy prudently opened its doors to the "gentlemen of the press." The effervescent Laniboire, at home in all sports, talked of going and cutting off the fellow's ears; and it was all that two or three of his confrères could do to restrain him. "Come, come, Laniboire, the sword at the side, never in the hand; you were the one who said it first, deuce take it! although the Academy did adopt it."

"You know, messieurs, that the elder Pliny, in Book XIII. of his Natural History" — Gazan had just arrived out of breath, at his heavy, pachydermatous trot — "mentions several autographical frauds, among others a false letter of Priam written on papyrus — "

"Monsieur Gazan has n't signed the roll," cried Picheral's shrill falsetto.

"Oh! yes, I beg pardon;" and the stout old fellow went and wrote his name, continuing his story of King Priam and the papyrus, which was drowned in that medley of angry voices, in which nothing could be distinguished save the word "Academy, academy," — all of them speaking of it as of a real, living person, whose inmost thoughts each individual was convinced that he alone knew and could express, to the exclusion of all the rest. Suddenly the yelling ceased as Astier-Réhu entered, signed the roll, and calmly placed on his desk the heavy satchel which he held under his arm; then he walked towards his confrères.

"Messieurs," he said, "I have unpleasant news for you. I have sent to the Library, for expert

examination, the twelve to fifteen thousand autographs which compose what I called my collection. Messieurs, they are all forged, every one. The Academy of Florence told the truth. I am the victim of a most extensive fraud."

While he wiped his brow, on which were great drops of perspiration, as a result of the effort required for that avowal, some one asked insolently, —

"What then, Monsieur le Secrétaire Perpetuel?"

"Then, Monsieur Danjou, the only thing left for me to do was to enter a complaint, and that is what I have done." And when they all protested, declaring that such a prosecution was not to be thought of, that it would bring ridicule on the Company: "I am truly distressed, my dear confrères, but my decision is irrevocable. Indeed the man is in prison and the preliminary examination has begun."

Never before had the hall of private meetings heard roars like those which greeted that statement; and, as usual, Laniboire distinguished himself among the fiercest, crying out that the Academy ought to get rid of so obnoxious a member. In the first outburst of wrath some discussed the suggestion aloud. Was it feasible? Could the Academy, when compromised by one of its members, say to him: "Begone, I reverse my decision — Immortal, I relegate you to the common herd of mortals"?

Suddenly, whether because he had caught a few words of the discussion, or by virtue of one of

those curious flashes of divination which sometimes illumine the most hopeless cases of deafness, old Réhu, who was standing apart and at some distance from the fire, fearful of an attack of apoplexy, remarked in his loud, monotonous voice: "Under the Restoration we turned out eleven members for purely political reasons." The patriarch clenched his statement with a movement of the head which evoked the testimony of his contemporaries of that period, white busts with empty eyes, arranged on pedestals around the room.

"Eleven, *bigre!*" muttered Danjou, amid a profound silence.

And Laniboire, always cynical, observed: "All organized bodies are cowardly; it 's the law of nature; we must live."

At this juncture, Épinchard, who had been talking earnestly near the door with Picheral the secretary, joined his confrères, and declared in hoarse tones, between two fits of coughing, that the perpetual secretary was not the only culprit in this matter — witness the minutes of the meeting of July 8, 1879, which the secretary would read. Thereupon Picheral read from his desk, very rapidly, in his chirping little voice, —

"*July* 8, 1879: *Léonard-Pierre-Alexandre Astier-Réhu presented to the Académie-Française a letter from Rotrou to Cardinal de Richelieu concerning the statutes of the Academy. The Academy, having examined that unpublished and very interesting document, congratulates the donor and orders that*

the Rotrou letter be inserted in the minutes. It is in these words —" Here the secretary slackened his pace, emphasizing maliciously every word — "*in these words, that is to say, with the errors due to negligence, which commonly occur in familiar correspondence and establish the authenticity of the document.*" In the pale light which fell through the window in the ceiling, they all stood as if turned to stone, avoiding one another's eyes, and listening in a sort of stupor.

"Shall I read the letter too?" Picheral was smiling, highly amused.

"The letter too," said Épinchard. But at the first sentence others cried: "Enough! enough! that will do!" They blushed now at that letter of Rotrou's, so unmistakably a rank imposture. A school-boy's composition, bungling sentences, and words half of which were unknown at the time it was supposed to have been written. What blindness! How could they have accepted it?

"You see, messieurs, that we should cut a poor figure visiting our wrath on our unfortunate confrère," observed Épinchard; and turning to the perpetual secretary, he adjured him to forego the scandal of a prosecution which would attack the reputation of the whole Academy and of the great cardinal himself.

But neither the warmth of his eloquence nor the oratorical fulness of his gesture in the direction of the cardinal-founder's hood, had any effect upon Astier-Réhu's unflinching obstinacy; he stood, erect and determined, at the little desk in

the centre of the room at which papers and communications are read, his fists clenched as if he were afraid that his will would be torn from his hands, declaring that "nothing, you understand, nothing!" would weaken his resolution. And his closed fingers rang angrily on the hard wood: "Ah! messieurs, I have already waited too long, yielded too far to considerations of this sort. I tell you that it chokes me to see that *Galileo*, which I am not rich enough to buy up, displayed in shop-windows with my name in complicity, as it were, with that forger!" What did he propose to do after all? To tear out with his own hands the tainted pages of his work, to make of them a public auto-da-fé, which this prosecution would give him an opportunity to do. "You talk of ridicule! Why, the Academy is far too exalted to fear anything of the sort. As for me, ruined, scoffed at as I am, I shall at least have the proud satisfaction of having placed my name, my work, and the dignity of history beyond reach of calumny. I ask no more than that."

Beneath his emphatic tone there was an accent of sincerity, of straightforwardness, which had a strange ring in that place, padded with compromises and circumlocutions of all sorts. Suddenly the door-keeper exclaimed: "Four o'clock, messieurs." — Four o'clock! And the arrangements for Ripault-Babin's funeral not yet completed. "Faith, yes! poor Ripault-Babin!" said Danjou in a jesting tone.

"He died very opportunely!" ejaculated Lani-

boire dismally. But the effect of his remark was lost. "To your places!" cried the apparitor; the director rang his bell, Desminières the chancellor took his place at his right and the perpetual secretary at his left, where he proceeded to read with his usual calm assurance the report of the committee on the funeral, amid earnest whispered conversations and the pattering of the hail on the glass.

"How late you are to-day!" grunted Corentine, as she opened the door to her master. — Another individual who had but little awe of the Institute. "Monsieur Paul is in your study with Madame. Go through the archives — the salon is full of people waiting for you."

An ominous place, those archives, where there was nothing left but the shelves on which the boxes used to stand, as if after a robbery or a conflagration. Ordinarily he avoided entering the room, but to-day he walked proudly through it, exalted by the resolution he had formed, by the declaration he had just made in the meeting. After that great effort of will and of courage, the thought that his son was waiting for him afforded him a pleasant sensation, a sort of relaxation of the tension on his nerves. He had not seen him since the duel, since he had been so deeply affected by the sight of his tall boy lying in bed, whiter than his sheets; and he trembled with joy at the thought of going to him, with his arms outstretched, of taking him to his heart in a

long embrace, without words. But as soon as he entered the study and saw the mother and son sitting close together, whispering, with their eyes on the floor, with their familiar air of mystery and confederacy, his effusive mood disappeared.

"Come in, for heaven's sake!" said Madame Astier, who was dressed to go out; then, half-seriously, as if introducing strangers, she added: "My dear — Monsieur le Comte Paul Astier."

"Master," said Paul, bowing.

Astier-Réhu eyed them both, contracting his heavy eyebrows: "Comte Paul Astier?"

The young man, still comely beneath the sunburn of his six months in the open air, explained that he had made himself a present of a Roman countship, less on his own account than to honor her who was about to take his name.

"You are going to be married?" queried the father, more and more suspicious. "To whom?"

"Duchesse Padovani."

"You are mad! Why, the duchess is twenty-five years older than you — and then — and then —"

He hesitated, trying to think of some respectful form of words, and at last blurted out brutally: "One does n't marry a woman who has belonged for years to another man, in the sight and knowledge of the whole world."

"A fact that has never interfered with our dining regularly at her house, by the way, and incurring a multitude of obligations to her," sneered Madame Astier, her little head reared for

the attack. Without answering her, without even looking at her, as if he deemed her incompetent to pass upon questions of honor, the good man went to his son, and in a tone of deep conviction, his flabby cheeks quivering with excitement, exclaimed: "Don't do this thing, Paul — for the honor of the name you bear, don't do this, my boy; I entreat you!" He put his hand on his shoulder and shook him in his emotion, while his voice quivered. But the young man drew away, disliking such demonstrations, and defended himself with vague phrases: "I don't think — that 's not the way I feel." And before the sullen impassiveness of that face, whose glance avoided his, before that son who seemed to be so far away from him, the father instinctively raised his voice, asserting his authority as head of the family. A smile which he detected between Paul and his mother, a fresh proof of their connivance in this ignominious affair, put the finishing touch to his exasperation. He became frantic, he roared aloud, threatening to protest publicly, to write to the newspapers, to blast both their reputations, mother's and son's alike, in his history. That was his most terrible threat! When he said of a personage of the past: "I have scored him in my *histoâre*," he could conceive of no more condign chastisement. But the allies were but little impressed. Madame Astier, being almost as familiar with the threat of blasting reputations as with the carting of the trunk through the halls, simply said as she buttoned her gloves: "You know that

everything can be heard in the next room." Indeed, despite the door and the curtains, they could hear the murmur of conversation in the salon.

At that, Léonard Astier laid a restraining hand upon his wrath and reduced its expression to a whisper. "Listen to me, Paul," he said, waving his forefinger in his son's face, "if this plan that you mention is carried out, never expect to see me again. I shall not be at your wedding. I will have no more of you, even on my death-bed. You are no longer my son. I turn you out and curse you."

Paul replied very calmly, drawing back from the finger which touched his face: "Oh! this cursing and blessing, you know, my dear father, is n't done in good families nowadays. Even on the stage they don't curse or bless any more."

"But they still chastise, Monsieur scoundrel!" roared the old man, raising his hand.

The mother uttered a fierce cry: "Léonard!" — while Paul, with an agile parry, turned the blow aside as calmly as in Keyser's establishment, and muttered, without releasing the wrist he had seized: "Oh! no, not that, never!"

The old Auvergnat in a furious rage, tried to free himself. But, strong as he was, he had found his master; and during that horrible moment, while the father and son were breathing their hatred into one another's faces, exchanging murderous glances, the salon door opened, revealing the doll-like, amiable smile of a stout lady with feathers and flowers in her hair.

" I beg your pardon, dear master, just a word. Ah! Adélaïde is here — and Monsieur Paul, too! — charming, divine. Oh! ah! a family tableau."

A family tableau, in sooth; but the tableau of a modern family, marred by the long seam which runs from top to base of European society and saps its very foundations, hierarchy and authority; a seam even more noticeable than elsewhere at the Institute, beneath the majestic dome where the traditional domestic virtues are weighed and rewarded.

XVI.

It was stiflingly hot in the court-room of the eighth arrondissement when the case of Albin Fage at last came on for trial, after an interminable preliminary examination and a determined effort on the part of certain persons of great influence to stay the prosecution. Never had that criminal court-room, whose damp blue walls, with their faded lozenge-shaped gilding, exhaled an odor of rags and poverty, held such a fashionable throng of social celebrities crowded upon its filthy benches, struggling in solid masses in the corridors; so many flower-bedecked hats, spring costumes with the stamp of the great dressmakers, in sharp contrast to the dead black of the caps and gowns. And still people crowded through the porch at the entrance, where the folding doors swung ceaselessly back and forth before a sea of serried heads, perforce erect, in the pale light of the landing.

They were all familiar, more than familiar, pitiably hackneyed and stale, those effigies which were seen at all Parisian functions, fashionable burials, or important first nights: Marguerite Oger in the vanguard, and the little Countess of Foder, and the lovely Madame Henry of the American legation. Then there were the sisterhood of the

Academy: Madame Ancelin in purple, on the arm of Raverand, the senior advocate; Madame Eviza, a cluster of little roses, surrounded by a buzzing black swarm of young ecclesiastics; and behind the bench, in the reserved enclosure, Danjou, standing with folded arms, towering above judges and audience, his profile outlined against the high window, with the typical old mountebank's lines, rigid and regular, which have been seen everywhere for forty years, the prototype of social monotony and its unvarying manifestations. With the exception of Astier-Réhu and Baron Huchenard, who were summoned as witnesses, he was the only academician who dared brave the trial, especially the comments of Albin Fage's advocate, that terribly satirical Margery, whose nasal "*couin*" invariably makes court and audience roar with laughter.

There was to be plenty of amusement; one could feel it in the air, in the jaunty tilting of caps, in the mischievous flashing and twinkling of eyes and mouths, signalling to one another from a distance with little warning signs. So many pleasant tales were told concerning the amatory prowess of the little hunchback who had taken his place in the criminal's dock, and who, raising his long pomaded head, cast over the railing into the audience one of those hawk-like glances which women never misunderstand. There was talk of compromising letters, of a memorandum of the accused giving the names outright of two or three women eminent in society, names that were

always involved in every filthy affair. A copy of this document was being passed about among the newspaper men, a sort of autobiography, artless and self-complacent, wherein the little monster's conceit was intensified by the vanity peculiar to the mechanic "who is self-taught;" but it actually contained none of the revelations hinted at.

Fage contented himself with informing his judges that he was born near Vassy (Haute-Marne) as straight as anybody — that claim is very common among hunchbacks — and that a fall from a horse, at the age of fifteen, had twisted and curved his back. Like most of his congeners, whose development is very slow, sexual passion had come to him very late in life, but with most extraordinary violence, at the time he was working for a publisher on Passage des Panoramas. As his deformity was an obstacle in the matter of conquests, he set about finding some method of making money rapidly; and the narrative of his love-affairs, alternating with that of his forgeries, the processes he employed, inks and parchments, was divided into chapters with such titles as these: *My first victim. — Angelina, book-stitcher. — For a flame-colored ribbon. — The gingerbread stall. — I enter into business relations with Astier-Réhu. — The mysterious ink. — Challenge to the chemists of the Institute.*

The most noticeable result of the reading of this document was a feeling of dismay that the perpetual secretary of the Académie-Française, that the official exponents of science and litera-

ture, should have allowed themselves to be duped for two or three years by that ignorant cripple's brain, stuffed with the débris of libraries, with ill-digested book-clippings; that was the astounding absurdity of the business and the cause of the enormous attendance. They came to see the Academy on the criminal's stool in the person of Astier-Réhu, upon whom all eyes were fixed as he sat in the front row of witnesses, motionless, lost in thought, answering shortly and without turning his head the vapid flattery of de Freydet, who stood behind him, black-gloved and with a broad band of crêpe on his hat, in mourning for his sister, recently deceased. The worthy candidate, who had been summoned by the defence, feared that that fact might injure him in his master's estimation, and he apologized profusely, explained how he had met that villanous Fage at Védrine's; but his whispering was lost in the noise of the court-room and the droning voice of the clerk, calling cases and postponing them, the monotonous "Postponed for a week, postponed for a week," like the fall of the guillotine, cutting short the protestations of the lawyers, the piteous complaints of the poor devils, with flushed faces, mopping their foreheads at the bar: "But, Monsieur le Président —" "Postponed for a week!" — Sometimes, from the rear of the court-room, a tearful cry, accompanied by a frantic waving of arms: "I am here, Monsieur le Président, but I can't move — there 's too big a crowd." — "Postponed for a week." — Ah! when

one has seen the docket cleared in that way, and the symbolical scales performing their functions with such dexterity, one conceives a grand idea of the Law. One experiences much the same sensation as at a funeral service hurried through with a rush, by a strange priest, at a pauper's burial.

At last the president's voice called: "Albin Fage!" — There was a profound silence in the room and far out on the landing, where people stood on benches to see. Then, after a brief mumbling at the bar, the witnesses passed between the serried rows of gowns to the room reserved for them, — a bare, dismal room with worn red tiles, dimly lighted by a window looking on a narrow court. Astier-Réhu, who was to testify first, did not enter the room, but paced back and forth in the dark corridor between it and the court-room. To Freydet, who would have stayed behind with him, he exclaimed in a hollow voice: "No, no — leave me. I want you to leave me!" — And the candidate, abashed, must needs mingle with the other witnesses, who were talking in little groups: Baron Huchenard, Bos the palæographer, Delpech the chemist, of the Academy of Sciences, divers experts in handwriting, and two or three pretty girls, of the number of those whose portraits adorned the walls of Albin Fage's room, overjoyed at the advertisement the trial would give them, laughing aloud in their flaring *directoire* costumes, in striking contrast to the linen cap and knitted mittens of the concierge

of the Cour des Comptes. Védrine also was summoned, and Freydet sat by his side on the broad sill of the open window. Caught up and carried onward by the contrary currents which tear destinies asunder in Paris, the two schoolfellows had not met since the previous summer, except at poor Germaine's recent obsequies. And Védrine pressed his friend's hand warmly and inquired about his health, his state of mind after that terrible blow.

"It was hard, yes, indeed it was hard, but what would you have? I have resigned myself to it." And as the other opened his eyes at such pitiless selfishness, he added: "*Dame!* just think of it — twice within a year they have plucked me!"

The only terrible blow to him was his failure to obtain Ripault-Babin's chair, which had just escaped him as Loisillon's had before; but in a moment he understood and heaved a deep sigh. Ah! yes, his Germaine. She had worn herself to death last winter over his ill-fated candidacy. Two dinners a week, and until midnight, sometimes one o'clock in the morning, wheeling her chair into every corner of the salon. She had sacrificed her last remaining strength in the cause, being even more intensely interested, more persistent than her brother. At last, at the very last, when she could not speak, her poor distorted fingers continued to move about on the sheet. — "Yes, my dear fellow, she died computing my chances of obtaining that damned chair. Ah! for her sake alone, I will belong to their Acad-

emy, in spite of them all, for the joy of that dear memory." — He stopped suddenly, then continued, in a changed, much lower voice, —

"Indeed, I don't know why I tell you this. It is the truth that, since they planted this craving in my brain, I can think of nothing else. My sister died, I hardly wept for her. I had to keep on paying my visits, soliciting for the Academy, as What's-His-Name says. I am withering under it, I am killing myself; it is genuine madness."

In these brutal words and the indistinct, feverish tone in which they were uttered, the sculptor could not recognize his Freydet, formerly so gentle and courteous, so instinct with life. His wandering eye, the care-worn fold across his brow, the burning touch of his hands bore witness to the passion, the fixed idea; but the meeting with Védrine seemed to have relieved the tension somewhat, and he asked, affectionately: "What are you doing? Where have you been? How are your wife and your children?"

His friend replied with his quiet smile. Thank God! the whole establishment was well. The little girl was to be weaned. The boy continued to fulfil his functions, which consisted in being handsome and looking forward anxiously to old Réhu's hundredth birthday. As for himself, he was at work. Two pictures in the Salon that year, not badly placed and sold reasonably well. On the other hand, a creditor as impudent as he was relentless had seized the paladin, who, after encumbering a superb ground-floor apartment on

Rue de Rome, had shifted his quarters to a stable at Bâtignolles, and was now cooling his heels under the shed of a dairyman at Levallois, where they sometimes went, *en famille*, to visit him.

"Such is fame!" added Védrine, with a laugh, as the usher's voice called Astier-Réhu to testify. The perpetual secretary's silhouette stood out for a moment against the dusty light of the court-room; he was very erect and walked with a firm step; but his back, which he did not think of, and his broad trembling shoulders betrayed intense emotion.

"Poor Crocodilus!" muttered the sculptor; "he is going through some rough experiences. This autograph business and his son's marriage—"

"Paul Astier married?"

"Three days ago, to the duchess. A sort of morganatic marriage, with no one present save the young man's mamma and the four witnesses. I was one of them, of course, for by a strange fatality I seem to have a share in all the acts and schemes of that Astier family."

And Védrine told of his amazement when he saw Duchesse Padovani enter the waiting-room at the mayor's office, pale as a dead woman, still haughty, but heartbroken, disenchanted, beneath a mass of gray hair, her poor beautiful hair which she no longer took the trouble to dye. By her side was Paul Astier, Monsieur le Comte, cool and smiling, as pretty as ever. They all stared at one another, and nobody could find a word to say

except the clerk, who, after looking over the two old ladies, felt called upon to remark with a bow and an affable smile, —

"Everybody is here except the bride."

"The bride is here," retorted the duchess, stepping forward with a toss of her head.

From the mayor's office, where the deputy-mayor on duty had the good taste to spare them anything in the nature of a discourse, they went to the Catholic Institute on Rue de Vaugirard. An aristocratic church, with a profusion of gold decoration, a glare of candelabra, and not a soul present. Only the wedding-party on a single row of chairs, listening to Monsignor Adriani, the papal nuncio, as he mumbled an interminable homily which he read from an illuminated volume. And it was a noble spectacle to see that long-nosed, thin-lipped, worldly prelate, with his violet cape over his narrow shoulders, discoursing of the groom's honorable traditions and the bride's "juvenile graces," with a dark, sneering, sidelong glance, which fell upon the velvet prie-Dieu at which the ill-assorted couple were kneeling. And then the going out, the cold salutations exchanged under the arches of the little cloister, and the duchess's sigh of relief, her "Thank God, it is over!" in the desperate tone of a woman who has measured the depth of the pit and throws herself into it with her eyes open, in fulfilment of a promise to which she is bound in honor.

"Oh! I have seen much that was dismal and

pitiful in my life, but never anything so heart-rending as Paul Astier's marriage!"

"An airy rascal, our young friend, all the same!" said Freydet between his teeth.

"Yes, one of our prettiest *struggle-for-lifeurs!*" The sculptor repeated the word with emphasis: "*Struggle-for-lifeurs!*" — designating thereby the new race of unscrupulous little devils, who make use of the Darwinian theory of the struggle for life as a sort of scientific excuse for all sorts of villanies.

"However, he is rich at last," rejoined Freydet. "His nose didn't lead him astray this time."

"We must wait and see. The duchess is not of a yielding disposition, and he had an infernally evil look in his eye at the mayor's office. If his old lady bores him too much, we may yet see this son and grandson of Immortals at the Assizes!"

"Witness Védrine!" roared the usher. At the same moment a loud roar of laughter from the dense, sympathetic crowd escaped through the half-open door. "Cristi! they're not having a bad time in there," said the soldier who was on duty in the corridor.

The witness-room, which had gradually emptied while the two old schoolmates were talking, now contained only Freydet and the concierge of the Cour des Comptes, who was terrified at the idea of appearing in court, and was twisting her bonnet-strings like a maniac. To the Candidate, on the other hand, it was the opportunity of a

lifetime to pour incense on the Academy and its Perpetual Secretary in a little speech which would be spread far and wide by the newspapers, — a sort of prologue to his discourse on the day of his admission. Left alone when the good woman was summoned in her turn, he paced the floor, pausing at intervals in front of the window, and declaimed well-rounded periods, accentuated by graceful, black-gloved gestures. But in the house opposite, a dismal, forbidding, pestiferous hovel, exuding the vile, shameful professions which it sheltered, those gestures were misunderstood; a fat hand attached to a bare arm put aside a pink curtain and beckoned an invitation. — "Oh! this Paris!" — The recipient's brow flushed with shame. He hastily turned away from the window and took refuge in the passage.

"The prosecution is talking now," whispered the sentry, while a voice quivering with affected indignation vociferated in the overheated atmosphere of the court-room: "You have traded upon an old man's harmless passion."

Freydet thought aloud: "Well! what about me?"

"It seems as if they must have forgotten you."

"As usual!" said the poor fellow, sadly, to himself.

At that moment a tremendous outburst of uncontrollable laughter welcomed the production of the false Mesnil-Case collection: letters from kings, popes, empresses, Turenne, Buffon, Montaigne, La Boëtie, Clemence Isaure; and at each

new name in that extraordinary list, revealing the abnormal gullibility of the official historian, and how that little imp had made fools of the whole Institute, the delight of the crowd redoubled. Freydet could listen no longer to that disrespectful laughter aimed at his patron and master, Astier-Réhu, especially as he felt that he himself was struck by it on the rebound, his candidacy once more endangered. He made his escape, hurried downstairs and wandered about a long while in the courtyards, then on the sidewalk in front of the gateway, and finally mingled with the crowd that came pouring out at the end of the trial, amid the running to and fro of servants, the rumbling of carriages, in the lovely fading light of a June day, while pink, purple, or green parasols enlivened the scene with the brilliant colors of a flower-garden. Peals of laughter arose from all the groups, as at the close of a very amusing play. The little hunchback was well salted; five years imprisonment and the costs; but how funny his advocate was! Marguerite Oger was convulsed; she laughed as in the second act of *Musidora*: "Oh! my children! my children!" —and Danjou, as he escorted Madame Ancelin to her carriage, cynically remarked aloud: "It's a direct slap in the face at the Academy — but so well delivered!"

Léonard Astier, who walked away alone, without turning his head, heard these remarks and others as well, notwithstanding the whispered warnings: "Here he is! be careful!" And it

was the beginning of his loss of prestige, his ridiculous experience being known and laughed at by all Paris.

"Take my arm, my dear master." Freydet had overtaken him, yielding to an irresistible impulse of the heart.

"Ah! my friend, what joy you give me!" said the old man, in a hollow, tearful voice.

They walked some time in silence. The verdure on the quays shaded and embellished the stone-work; the noises of the street and the river echoed cheerily in the air. It was one of those times when it seems that human misery declares a truce.

"Where shall we go?" Freydet asked.

"Wherever you choose — but not to my house," said the good man, who trembled like a child at the thought of the scene he would have with his wife.

They dined together at the Point-du-Jour, after walking a long while by the river; and, with the help of the disciple's soothing words and the mild beauty of the evening, Astier-Réhu returned home very late, tranquillized, recovered from the efforts of his five hours of torture on the witness stand in the eighth criminal court, five hours during which he had been compelled to undergo, with hands tied, the insulting laughter of that mob and the advocate's stream of vitriol. — "Laugh, laugh, ye baboons! posterity will judge." — He consoled himself thus as he crossed the spacious courtyards of the Institute, where everybody was asleep, all

the lights extinguished, the staircase recesses making great rectangular black holes at the right and left. He crept upstairs to his study, feeling his way, noiselessly and without a light, like a thief. Since Paul's marriage and their rupture, he had slept there on an improvised couch, to avoid the persistent nocturnal discussions in which the wife always triumphs, even when she has ceased to be a wife, by virtue of the never-failing resource of her nerves, and in which the man ends by conceding everything, promising everything, for the sake of peace and an opportunity to sleep!

Sleep! he had never felt the need of it so intensely as at the end of that long day of excitement and fatigue, and he was feeling his way across his study, already asleep in fancy, when he discovered an indistinct human figure at the corner of the window.

"Well! I hope you 're satisfied!"

His wife? Yes, his wife, watching for him, waiting for him! and her hissing voice brought him to a standstill in the midst of the darkness, to listen.

"You have had your trial. You wanted ridicule; you are covered with it, flooded with it from head to foot, so that you will never dare show your face again. Oh! it was very fine to shriek that your son was dishonoring the name of Astier; but thanks to you that name has become the synonym of ignorance and credulity, — no one can mention it without a laugh. And all this, God save the

mark! to save your historical work. — Fool! Who knows anything about your historical work? Who cares whether your documents are false or genuine? You know very well that nobody reads what you write."

She went on and on, raising her shrill thread of a voice to its highest pitch, and to him it was like a continuation of the pillory of the court-room, of the stream of insults, to which he listened as in the court-room, without interrupting, without a threatening movement, with the consciousness of a sanction out of reach of any attack or reply. But how pitiless that invisible mouth was, biting him and wounding him in every part, and burying its teeth in his honor as a man and an author! — Fine productions, his books were! Did he have any idea that his election to the Academy had anything to do with them? Why, it was she, she alone, to whom he owed his green coat! A lifetime of intrigues and manœuvring to force the doors one after another — her whole youth sacrificed to the tremulous declarations and advances of old men, who filled her with loathing. — "*Dame!* my dear, there was no escape. To enter the Academy a man must have some talent — you had none — or else a great name, or exalted rank. You lacked every essential. So I took a hand in it!" — And lest he should entertain any doubt on the subject, lest he should see in her words simply the exasperation of a humiliated woman, wounded in her vanity as a wife, in her blind motherly affection, she reviewed the details

of his election, reminded him of his own famous remark about Madame Astier's violets, which smelt of tobacco, although he never smoked. "A remark, my dear, which made you more famous than all your books."

He uttered a low, deep moan, the hollow exclamation of an eviscerated man holding his entrails in place with both hands. The shrill little voice continued, unmoved, —

"For God's sake, pack your trunk once and for all! Let us never hear of you again. Luckily, our Paul is rich. He will send you enough to live on, for of course you must see that now you will never find a publisher or a review that will look at your twaddle, and your son's alleged 'dishonor' will keep you from starving to death."

"This is too much!" muttered the poor man. He turned and left the room, fleeing from that stinging rage; and as he felt his way by the walls along the corridors and stairways, and crossed the echoing courtyards, he said again and again, almost weeping: "This is too much! too much!"

Whither does he go?

Straight ahead, as in a dream; he crosses the square and half of the bridge, where the cool air revives him. He seats himself on a bench, pushes back his hat and turns up his sleeves, to calm his throbbing arteries. The regular lapping of the water gradually soothes him, he collects his ideas; but the result is simply that he remembers and suffers anew. What a woman! What a monster! And he has actually been able

to live with her thirty-five years without finding it out! He shudders with horror at the memory of all the abominable things he has heard. She has spared him nothing, left nothing alive within him, not even the pride which had thus far kept him on his feet: his faith in his work, his belief in the Academy. And at the thought of the Academy he instinctively turns. At the end of the deserted bridge, which widens into a broad avenue at the foot of the monument, the Palais Mazarin, a dense black mass in the darkness, rears its porch and its dome, as on the cover of the Didot publications, at which he had gazed so long and earnestly in his youth. — Oh! that dome, that pile of stone, a disappointing goal, the cause of his misfortunes! — Thither he had gone in search of a wife, without love or joy, simply for the promise of the Institute. He obtained the dignity he so craved — and now he knows how he obtained it! — A pretty business, surely!

He hears footsteps and loud laughter on the bridge, approaching him: students returning to the Quarter with their mistresses. He fears that he may be recognized, so rises and leans on the railing; and as the merry party brushes against him without seeing him, he reflects bitterly that he has never had any pleasure in life, never enjoyed a lovely evening like this one, singing merrily under the stars, because of his ambition, always on the alert, always aiming for that temple dome which has given him in return — what? Nothing, absolutely nothing. — Long, long ago, on the

day of his reception, when the speeches were ended and the spiteful greetings exchanged, he had this same feeling of emptiness and of disappointed hope; in the cab which took him home to lay aside the green coat, he said to himself: "What! I am really a member? Is this all it amounts to?" — Afterward, by dint of lying to himself, by repeating with his confrères that it was delightful, exquisite, the joy of joys, he ended by believing it. — But now the veil has fallen, he can see distinctly, and he would like to cry out with a hundred voices to the young men of France: "It is not true. They are deceiving you. The Academy is a fraud, a mirage! Do your work and make your way outside of the Academy. Above all things, make no sacrifices for it, for it has nothing to give you of what you do not bring to it — neither talent, nor fame, nor supreme self-content. The Academy furnishes neither assistance nor shelter. It is a hollow idol, a religion which does not console. The great woes of life assail you there no less than elsewhere. Men have killed themselves under that dome; men have gone mad there! And they who turn to it in their distress, who hold out to it arms too discouraged to love or to curse, embrace nought but a shadow — and emptiness — emptiness."

He is talking aloud, bareheaded, clinging to the parapet with both hands, like the old professor of former days, on the edge of his chair in his lecture-room. The river rolls below streaked

with black, between its rows of lanterns which blink with the silent life of light, restless like everything that moves and sees and cannot express its thoughts. A drunken song rises uncertainly from the shore below:

"When Cupid wakes in the morning—"

Some jovial Auvergnat returning to his coal barge. It reminds him of Teyssèdre the scrubber, and his glass of new wine; he can see him wiping his mouth with the back of his sleeve: "There 's nothing so good as that in this life!" Even that humble pleasure he has never known — he is obliged to envy its possessor. And feeling that he is all alone, with nowhere to go, no shoulder to weep upon, he realizes that that creature over yonder was right, and that he must needs pack his trunk once and for all!

In the morning the police found on a bench on Pont des Arts a broad-brimmed hat, one of those hats which retain something of the physiognomy of their wearer. Inside was a large gold watch and a visiting-card bearing the name of Léonard Astier-Réhu, Perpetual Secretary of the Académie Française, with these words scrawled in pencil: "I die here by my own hand." — By his own hand, indeed! And even better than that brief sentence in his long, firm handwriting, did the expression of his features, the clenched teeth, the fierce, protruding jaw tell the story of his firm determination to die, when, after a long morning's search, the boatmen extricated him from the

meshes of an iron grating surrounding a bath-house for women very near the bridge. He was carried first to the hospital, where the secretary of the Institute came and identified him. He was not the first Perpetual who had been fished from the Seine; the same thing had happened in the elder Picheral's time, under almost the same circumstances. So that Picheral the younger did not seem greatly moved, being particularly interested in watching the light glisten on the skull, as bald and shiny as a *jeton de presence.*

The clock on Palais Mazarin was striking one when the litter from the hospital, carried by bearers with slow, heavy tread, passed through the arched gateway, its path marked by sinister stains. At the foot of staircase B, they stopped to take breath. The high walls surrounding the courtyard, flooded with dazzling sunlight, outlined a large square of blue sky. The curtain of the litter was drawn aside for a moment, and Astier-Réhu's features were exhibited for the last time to his colleagues of the Committee on the Dictionary, who had just adjourned their meeting as a token of respect. They stood about, with uncovered heads, not so much grieved as shocked and scandalized. Inquisitive passers-by also stopped to look, mechanics, clerks, apprentices, — for the Institute is used as a passage way from Rue Mazarine to the quay; among them was Freydet the candidate, who, as he wiped his eyes, weeping for his dear master, thought way down

in his heart, not without a sense of shame, that another chair was vacant.

Just at that moment old Jean Réhu came downstairs for his constitutional. He knew nothing of what had happened and seemed surprised at the presence of the crowd, which he surveyed from one of the lower stairs, then approached to look, despite the efforts of those who waved him back with horrified gestures. Did he understand? Did he recognize the face? His features did not change, his eyes were as devoid of expression as Minerva's yonder, under her bronze helmet. After a long, earnest gaze, during which the striped curtain was lowered over the poor dead face, he walked away, erect and proud, his shadow by his side, a veritable Immortal; and his shake of the head seemed to say, —

"I have seen that too!"

PREFACE.

"I CERTAINLY do not blame the great Darwin, but the hypocritical knaves who invoke his authority, who assume to transform a single observation, a scholar's single discovery, into an article of the Code, and to apply it systematically. Ah! you consider those fellows great men, able men! But I tell you that they are nothing of the sort! There can be no greatness without kindliness, compassion, human sympathy. I tell you that these theories of Darwin are villanous in their application, because they seek out all that is brutish in a man's nature, and arouse all that still remains on four paws in the quadruped become biped."

These words, in the mouth of one of my characters, summarize the exalted idea of my work and its far-reaching title; too far-reaching indeed, if we take the words *The Struggle for Life* literally. Assuredly I am not so presumptuous as to attempt to describe in one evening, any more than in one book or series of books, that battle for existence of which we never see more than one little corner, our own, like the soldier lost to sight in the bloody mêlées described by Stendhal and Tolstoï, over which the same mysterious destiny will always hover, veiled and obscure, despite the recent invention of smokeless powder. No, I have simply attempted to place upon the stage a few specimens of this new breed of little savages who make use of the Darwinian phrase,

"struggle for life," as a pretext and excuse for all sorts of villanies and infamies.

This type did not exist among us before the war.

"France is sentimental, it will probably become scientific," Gambetta used frequently to say; and I remember how fully I shared his ideas, with what ardor those about him adopted the brutish Saxon formulæ: "The strong devours the weak; the survival of the fittest," etc. Suddenly came the crime of Lebiez and Barré, scientific murder based upon the Darwinian theories, behind which those two bandits undertook to take refuge, — Lebiez especially, the mind of the pair, the common brain; Lebiez, who, after the deed, had the ghastly self-possession to deliver a discourse in the Quartier des Écoles on the struggle for life, and to repeat it in part before the examining magistrate.

That incident seemed to me to illustrate clearly the danger of the imperfectly understood theory, — the possible putting into practice, by knaves or ignorant men, of doctrines distorted from their true meaning; the atrocious selfishness of mankind laid down as a new law, and all means of glutting an appetite, all crimes, made lawful in the name of a natural theory formulated by a great thinker in the isolation and abstraction of his ivory tower. At the same time, in that Lebiez — a pedantic, evil-minded brute, of whom I heard his comrades say in all seriousness, "a type full of promise," "a very able fellow" — was disclosed to me the entirely modern physiognomy of the *struggle for lifeur*,[1] as I have dubbed him to please the Parisians, who like nothing so much as to murder foreign words, and who already counted *high lifeur* in their vocabulary.

[1] Thus in the original.

The silhouette of that pedagogical and scientific young scoundrel interested me so, I felt that it was so true to life, so perfect a product of the time, that I began a book, half novel, half history, entitled, *Lebiez and Barré — Two Young Frenchmen of To-day.* I had been at work on it for several months when there appeared in France a translation of Dostoïewski's admirable *Crime and Punishment,* which proved to be exactly the book that I was trying to write. The Russian student Rodion personified the student Lebiez; his philosophical soliloquies touching the murder of the old woman were the dialogues I imagined between Lebiez and Barré, at night, in the grocery on Rue Racine. The review article written by Rodion on the subject of the *Right to do Murder* was the discourse of Lebiez in the Latin Quarter. I had no choice but to abandon my book; but the *struggle for lifeur* continued to haunt me, for the type was reproduced in a multitude of specimens all about me, becoming every day more pronounced and multiplying rapidly in society, in political, artistic, and worldly circles; so that one fine morning that amiable blackguard, Paul Astier, a compound of several young adventurers of my acquaintance, rose up beside my study table, fashionably attired, of sinister aspect, substantially as I have exhibited him in *The Immortal* and *The Struggle for Life.*

Whether he has read Darwin I doubt — indeed I am sure of the contrary; but the little that he knows of his works, which he quotes freely in the Chamber, at the club, at the water-cure, in the fencing-room — wherever he is with men alone, for with women the fellow talks very differently — the few Darwinian formulæ which he has caught on the wing suffice to explain scientifically

in his own eyes, yes, and in the eyes of the world, the criminal existence that he leads, as an ambitious man, a bully and a rake. "*Canaille*, I snap my fingers at 'em! I am struggling for life." Lebiez, observe, worked in the name of the same principle; between the two *struggle for lifeurs*, with equally knavish and depraved hearts, the only difference is in stage-setting and costume. It is simply a question of linen. I tried to convey this impression to the public, and, I determined that, when Paul Astier described Lydie Vaillant's suicide, he should have the bare arms, the open, rumpled shirt, and the turned-up sleeves of physical exertion, and that the *struggle for lifeur* should appear in his brutal cynicism, no longer disguised by a white cravat and dress coat. Hence the tableau of the dressing-room in which some short-sighted minds have seen nothing more than a realistic undressing scene.

Undoubtedly the spruce young bandit cannot imagine that there is the slightest possible analogy between him, the man of the world, the statesman, the son and grandson of Immortals, and that miserable doctor's apprentice. A Darwinist, to be sure, but of a different build, and protected by his ambition and by his love of power; preservatives as sure as the clearest conscience that ever honest man possessed. Have no fears therefore for young Astier. However earnestly he may desire to rid himself of his incubus, there is no danger that he will yield to the criminal temptation. He is much too judicious, much too shrewd! — And suddenly something that is stronger than he — thus we see that there is something stronger than the strongest man — appears and places in his hands a murderous and safe weapon. I confess that that is what I like best in my drama, — that little

phial placed mysteriously on the corner of the toilet-table, to tempt, to madden the *struggle for lifeur*, to lead him to the verge of crime.

Why not to the crime itself?

There are two reasons for that. The first is that society, after all, has certain habits of decency, of refinement, which serve as a curb upon it, in spite of everything. "A white cravat is almost equivalent to good morals," as Chemineau says. And the second, the real reason is that Paul Astier belongs to a "boat" wherein, without any absolute belief in the old institutions, there still remains a vague instinct of the law, of the gendarme. I may perhaps be mistaken, but it seems to me that that crew of men between thirty and forty, as little resolved upon evil as upon good, a race of perplexed, inquisitive Hamlets, has not yet arrived at the absolute, militant *nothingness* of the boat which comes behind, from which all respect and all morality have been thrown overboard. But be sure of this: that, although Paul Astier lacked courage once, neither hand nor heart would fail him at the second attempt. Poor Mari'-Anto is so sure of it that — while she is still shuddering over Herscher's reading, that ghastly tale of crime and the scaffold — her heart suddenly overflows with the maternal pity that is always on the alert in the depths of a wife's affection; and, to spare the wretch a fresh temptation, to save him from the shame and horror of the scaffold, she consents to the divorce which outrages all her convictions, and to which she had sworn never to submit.

Some persons would have preferred that the drama should stop there, as being more in conformity with the ordinary rules of life; that I should leave Paul Astier

triumphant, delivered from his old lady, to graze at leisure on the Austrian's millions. But I have an entirely different vision of life. I believe absolutely in the theory that "everything must be paid for;" I have always noticed that man receives the wage of his toil, be it good or evil, and not in the other life, of which I know nothing, but in this life of ours, sooner or later.

Now I confess that my detestation of the wicked is so intense that I have perhaps put too much refinement of cruelty in the execution of my Paul Astier. I have cut him down in the midst of his good fortune, so happy that he is almost turning virtuous, a spray of orange-blossom at his lips, and in his eyes the dazzling reflection of his lovely Jewess, rolling in gold; and at that precise moment, for which I have watched, I have caused Vaillant to apply to him the Darwinian theory of the strong devouring the weak: "I am armed, you are not; therefore I suppress you, villain!"—Worthy Père Vaillant! But he is no *struggle for lifeur*, he belongs to an old, very old boat, whose crew believed in a multitude of things long out of fashion; and when his blow was dealt and the beast struck down, his sweeping gesture heavenward, while he echoes the auctioneer's impassive "adjudged," shows plainly enough of what supreme and avenging tribunal he deems himself the instrument. "Bravo, d'Ennery!" the young and mettlesome Toupet de Nîmes murmured in a corner. At heart I am inclined to agree with him; but what would you have? my very blood is so permeated with hatred of that vile beast that I should have been quite capable of firing on him myself.

It remains for me to thank from the bottom of my heart the manager of the Gymnase and the actors in *The Struggle for Life*; for I am fully aware that with an

ordinary interpretation and in a less perfect setting my play would not have been received with such favor by the public. It is long and laden with details, it demands close attention, a commodity with which Parisians are most unwilling to part, and at times affords food for reflection, which is not to everybody's taste. Thanks to M. Victor Koning and his excellent artists, I succeeded when I had everything to fear; I am happy to express my gratitude to them thus publicly.

I was particularly afraid that the critics would make *The Struggle for Life* pay dearly for its close relationship to *The Immortal*, of which my play is in some sense the prolongation and the sequel. But nothing of the sort happened. The press displayed much good-will, or impartiality at all events. Beneath one or two criticisms only did I imagine that I could hear the growling of rancor clad in a coat with green palm-leaves, and I have not yet recovered from my surprise; for there is not a single anti-academical word in my play. And, after all, of what was that so berated *Immortal* guilty? Of having spoken disrespectfully of the French Academy? But what is respected in these days, I pray to know? Has it not happened that academicians, ay, and the most famous among them, have maltreated persons of the greatest eminence, or who are so esteemed?

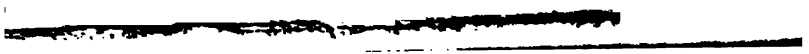
Did not Taine, of the Academy, attack Napoleon, the greatest man of this century, which can boast of men of the stature of Bismarck? Do you think that Renan, also an academician, adopts a very reverential attitude toward Jesus Christ in the biography, of which more than three hundred thousand copies have been sold?

And because I took a few liberties with that venerable institution; because I ventured to say that its favors,

while they did no harm, proved nothing; that men of talent could do very well without the stamp of its approval; because I was so audacious as to unveil the antics of that world of private intrigues, the multiple, contrary currents that blow in its cold corridors, the falls on its blind staircases, the bumps on the foreheads of the proudest mortals who stoop to enter its low doorways; because I pitied the distress of the candidates who are lured by the baits of the Academy and whom it tows in its wake; in a word, because I pointed out to young artists the trap set for all its proud and independent instincts, — see what a hue and cry, what a storm of rage and insult has been visited upon me!

Even to the long diatribe of M. Quesnay de Beaurepaire, who, the better to pay court to the Academy, extended the passages which he quoted from my book with little indignant, modest asterisks, representing the ordure which he could not quote, and to which he attributed the scandalous popularity of the work!

But where am I going? All this is very far away, since it concerns a novel published last year, and I was on the point of forgetting that it is *The Struggle for Life* that is under consideration and on the posters, and not *The Immortal.*



THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

CHARACTERS.

VAILLANT, tax-collector, 60 years old.
PAUL ASTIER, Deputy, 32.
CHEMINEAU, solicitor's clerk, 30.
COUNT ADRIANI, *garde-noble*, 28.
ANTONIN CAUSSADE, director of a laboratory, 25.
LORTIGUE, Paul Astier's secretary, 23.
HEURTEBIZE, head concierge at the château of Mousseaux.
THE NOTARY.
THE DUC DE BRÉTIGNY, of the Académie Française, 70.
STENNE, Paul's servant.
FIRST CAVALRYMAN, 12th Chasseurs.
SECOND CAVALRYMAN.
THE MESSENGER.
MARIA-ANTONIA, formerly Duchesse Padovani, now Madame Paul Astier, 50.
THE MARÉCHALE, 40.
ESTHER DE SÉLÉNY, 20.
LYDIE, Vaillant's daughter, 20.
THE MARQUISE DE ROCANÈRE, 25.
THE COUNTESS OF FODER.

Servants, Footmen, Gardeners.

The scene is laid in Paris and at the château of Mousseaux (Loir-et-Cher).

ACT FIRST.

PAUL ASTIER'S Apartments in the Padovani mansion.
A majestic study, lofty ceiling, severely simple hangings. — Door at the back. — At the right PAUL'S bedroom, concealed by rich dark portières. — Long window at the left. — Study table covered with pamphlets; chair behind it, facing PAUL'S bedroom. — At the back a long window opening on the terrace and garden. — As the curtain rises the window at the left is wide open. — It is early morning. — Little STENNE is standing on a step-ladder, washing the window-panes.

SCENE FIRST.

LORTIGUE AND STENNE.

LORTIGUE (*entering at the back of the stage, very spruce, collar turned up, wallet under his arm*).

Good morning, young Stenne.

STENNE (*from his ladder, without turning*).

Good morning, Monsieur Lortigue.

LORTIGUE (*putting his wallet on the table*).

Quite sharp for an April morning. Is the master at the Bois?

(*He opens a box of cigars, puts one in his mouth, and takes a handful, which he puts in his cigar-case.*)

STENNE.

No, Monsieur Lortigue. Monsieur has n't left his room yet.

LORTIGUE (*hastily replacing the cigars in the box*).

He is n't sick?

STENNE.

Sick? He — Paul Astier! (*He laughs.*) Never.

LORTIGUE.

It 's such an extraordinary thing. (*Lowering his voice and pointing to the door.*) Is he alone?

STENNE.

I fancy so. I never go in unless he rings for me. But of course he must be alone, as madame has been at Mousseaux, at her château in Touraine, for three months.

LORTIGUE.

To be sure. Three months is a long time, especially in a household that 's breaking up. (*He motions to the servant to come down from his ladder.*) Have n't you heard of anything new? Is n't there any gossip in the servants' quarters?

STENNE.

Anything new? — between monsieur and madame?

LORTIGUE.

No, no, not that. Hémerlingue, their banker, has just gone to pieces. It seems that they are caught in the smash, and that they lose everything.

STENNE.

I could n't tell you about that. All I know is that there are still about ten of us at the servants' table, and that madame has as many more with her at the château,

and the usual supply of horses, carriages, and hunting outfits. — Oh ! and then, you know, Monsieur Lortigue, with that man I am never frightened. I saw so much of that kind of thing when we were in architecture.

LORTIGUE.

True, he was an architect before his marriage.

STENNE.

I should say so. We were the ones who built the Ottoman embassy, the Keyser water-cure, and did the restoration of Mousseaux, our masterpiece.

LORTIGUE.

A genuine masterpiece, in very truth. While making over the château, to win the love of the châtelaine, to persuade the haughty Duchesse Maria-Antonia Padovani — Mari'-Anto, as her Corsicans call her — to become Madame Paul Astier ! That was what you might call a productive building.

STENNE.

For all that, it was pretty hard in the beginning. I remember our house on Rue Fortuny, a house in the style of Louis XII., built by us, very *chic*. We sustained a regular siege there. Were n't we hungry though ! We ate the mouldings.

LORTIGUE.

Were those heroic days long ago?

STENNE (*returning to his task*).

Three years, no more. After that we went into politics, like everybody else, and here we are to-day in

the Chamber, husband of a duchess and cousin of the greatest names in France.

LORTIGUE.

And washing windows at the hôtel Padovani, the finest specimen in the faubourg of an escutcheoned, seignorial old barrack. You are right, my boy, such luck is reassuring.

STENNE.

Yes, luck; and then (*with the gesture of a studio fag*), he knows how to mix his colors. There's no one like him for putting on his white or blue or red. He never makes a mistake in the tube.

LORTIGUE.

That 's a valuable quality in politics.

STENNE.

Yes, but think of the hard work, the poverty before reaching this point!

LORTIGUE.

But old Astier was rich. — (*Imitating the Auvergnat accent.*) Meuchieu Achtier from Chauvagnat, member of the Académie Française, lodged at the Inchtitute in the great Villemain's apartments. He must have helped you.

STENNE.

Not a bit of it. We were never on good terms with the old fellow.

LORTIGUE.

It 's a fact that the father and son don't belong to the same school. It 's a strange thing how that old wig, that mass of historico-philosophical drivel, the *Essay*

on Marcus Aurelius, the *Mission of Woman in the World*, could have produced such a perfect type as the master, so practical, so modern. (*Waving his hand in the direction of the bedroom.*) There 's a fellow who understands the mission of woman in the world differently from papa, and who did n't mould long in the great Villemain's *chalon*. It 's surprising how members of the same family differ! See how he goes — Ah! this morning's *Débats*. By the way, I must show it to him. — (*He goes to the bedroom door, raising the portière, and knocks.*) It 's I, Lortigue, the illustrious head of your secretarial department — he whom you have been pleased to dub Toupet de Nîmes. (PAUL ASTIER'S *voice is inaudible.*) Yes, monsieur. No, monsieur. (*Courtier-like laugh.*) Ha! ha! very neat. You know the *Débats* announces your appointment; — on the desk, very well. (*He returns to the desk and places one newspaper in plain sight on top of the others, then returns to the door.*) There 's a performance at the Opera to-night. Shall I send the box to the Maréchale de Sélény? Oh! yes, to be sure. The ladies are travelling. (*He returns to the table and places the ticket on it, talking to himself.*) So that 's why he is n't at the Bois this morning; the flirtation is interrupted. (*Aloud.*) I will also leave on the table Herscher's new volume that everybody is talking about. Yes, I know, you never read novels, you make them. But this is n't a novel, it 's a study on the youth of to-day. Epigraph by Darwin, your favorite author.

(*He places Herscher's book on the table and examines the morning mail minutely, postmarks and handwriting, and even holds the envelopes against the light to see their contents.*)

STENNE (*having closed the window, passes him, going towards the door at the rear with his ladder, and speaks in a tone of cold raillery*).

Don't disturb yourself, I beg you. You might wash the windows too, while you 're here.

(*Exit* STENNE.)

LORTIGUE (*returning to the bedroom door*).

Nothing more to say to me, master? Very good; at all events I shall see you at the Chamber. I will go to the Agricultural department on that business of the cousin's. He 's a bore, and compromising to boot, that provincial kinsman. —Throw him overboard? — Very good — I understand — No sentiment.

(*Exit* LORTIGUE *at the back of the stage. The stage remains empty for a moment, then a woman's bare arm raises the bedroom portière and* LYDIE'S *voice is heard.*)

LYDIE (*outside*).

Why no, no, there 's no one here.

SCENE II.

LYDIE VAILLANT, *afterward* PAUL ASTIER.

LYDIE (*in undervest, arms and shoulders bare, twisting and pinning up her hair*).

I want to read the paper myself. — (*She runs to the table and looks over the morning paper, which* LORTIGUE *has left open.*) — Ah! here it is. (*She reads.*) — "Yesterday morning, at the cabinet council, the appointment

of M. Paul Astier to be under-Secretary of State was decided upon."

(*She stands musing, with the paper in her hand.*)

PAUL ASTIER (*in very elaborate morning costume. He calls before entering*).

Lydie! (*Entering.*) Well, my child?

LYDIE (*putting down the paper*).

I was thinking that you are a great man now, a real great man.

PAUL.

Yes, I shall be a minister before I am thirty-five; that's not bad, is it?

LYDIE.

And what will become of your poor Lydie in this apotheosis?

PAUL.

She will always be the dearest thing in the world to me. Ah if I could only be free, make you my wife, my real wife!

LYDIE.

I have never asked for anything but your love — I am anxious above all things not to make you tired of me. When you have had enough of me, when I read in your eyes that you no longer love me — that can be read very easily, it seems — instead of pestering you, instead of making myself hateful —

PAUL (*in an undertone*).

What will you do?

LYDIE.

Let me look in your eyes. Oh! so long as they look at me like that, I have no fear.

PAUL (*stooping and depositing a kiss on her bare shoulders*).

Dear heart!

(*The door at the back of the stage is suddenly thrown open. Enters* CHEMINEAU. LYDIE *gives a little shriek and runs into the bedroom.*)

SCENE III.

PAUL ASTIER, CHEMINEAU.

(CHEMINEAU *has a smooth-shaven face, an expansive smile, the white cravat of a man of affairs, and a small travelling bag slung over his shoulder.*)

PAUL.

What! Chemineau. — Come in, come in.

CHEMINEAU.

What an idiot that Lortigue was, not to warn me. — (*He shakes hands with* PAUL, *motioning toward the bedroom.*) — Is the new one pretty?

PAUL (*annoyed*).

Bah! new indeed! six months! I am beginning to have —

CHEMINEAU (*with a motion toward the bedroom*).

Look out.

PAUL.

The portière is down. She can't hear anything.

CHEMINEAU.

I understand — it 's the little Tourainer, the duchess's former protégée, reader, companion. — (*In a tone of friendly reproof.*) — But why receive her here? Have n't you still your bachelor's quarters in Avenue Gabriel?

PAUL.

Oh! it 's only for this one time. Observe too that she came in from Rue de Lille through the garden; she 'll go out the same way, so nothing will be suspected.

CHEMINEAU.

You are wrong all the same in your present position with regard to your wife — watched, followed step by step, hour by hour.

PAUL.

Yes, I know; Lortigue — but he says only what I want him to say, and picks up only what I let drop.

CHEMINEAU (*with the admiring smile of a dupe, slightly forced*).

Ah! you rascal, you 're a sharp one. — (*Pointing to the bedroom.*) Then you had her come here purposely?

PAUL.

Perhaps so.

CHEMINEAU.

You would like to drive your wife to an angry outbreak — a complete rupture — the grand smash? You won't succeed.

PAUL.

Think not? To be sure, you have just left Mousseaux, have n't you?

CHEMINEAU.

This morning.

PAUL.

Did you see her?

CHEMINEAU.

Your wife?

PAUL (*clenching his teeth*).

Yes, my wife. Well?

CHEMINEAU.

Oh! she is perfect — dignified and serene with ruin staring her in the face — ready for anything you desire. You can sell the château, this house, estates, hounds, horses, and carriages. She leaves you free to decide as you please. But as to the divorce, that 's another matter. I tried to sound her, to insinuate a word or two, but she answered me with a "Never!" short and sharp, *à la* Padovani. I remembered Lortigue, Toupet de Nîmes, trying to argue with her, and getting a lash across the face for his pains. She had the self-same dog-whip in her hands, short handle and long lash. I took my leave, then returned to look over the estate a little. Truly regal, my dear fellow. — Those hornbeam hedges a league long, all radiating from the great steps in the court of honor — the four dentellated turrets — the gallery over the river. It will be a terrible task to find a purchaser.

PAUL.

That is done.

CHEMINEAU.

Three millions, you know?

PAUL.

Three millions, four millions, whatever is necessary. The purchaser is inspecting it at this moment.

CHEMINEAU.

Mazette! Then you expect to sell at private sale?

PAUL.

No, no, at auction. I don't wish to seem to know the purchasers.

CHEMINEAU.

This puts a very different face on affairs. If we sell Mousseaux for three millions, the disaster is reparable. Look you, as I was coming here I made a little calculation and this is the result I reached.

SCENE IV.

THE SAME, STENNE.

PAUL (*to* STENNE).

Well, what is it?

STENNE.

Two gentlemen, in a great hurry, who insist on seeing you.

CHEMINEAU.

Anything private?

PAUL (*reflecting*).

Private? — No I think not. (*He takes the cards from the servant's hands, looks at them, starts back, takes a step toward his bedroom door, then returns to Chemineau, who is about to retire.*) Don't go, don't go. (*To the servant.*) Ask them to wait a moment.

(*Exit* STENNE.)

SCENE V.

PAUL, CHEMINEAU.

PAUL.

You are right. — (*Pointing to the bedroom.*) — It was an imprudent thing to do. — (*Showing him the two cards he has in his hand.*) — The father, and the fiancé.

CHEMINEAU (*reading aloud*).

"Vaillant, collector of tolls and taxes. — Doctor Antonin Caussade, director of laboratory." — (*Interrupting himself hastily.*) — Not at all, not at all!

PAUL.

What do you mean?

CHEMINEAU.

The father and fiancé, I agree, but they have n't come for the purpose you imagine; — it 's a matter of tenancy, a lease about to expire. — Your wife long ago gave these Caussades an utterly absurd lease, which I thought it inadvisable to renew. They appeal to you, as they told me they should.

PAUL.

You think, then —

CHEMINEAU.

That it's a mere coincidence. At all events, do you want me to receive them? The old fellow amuses me. He froths and foams.

PAUL.

All right, receive him — that will be the wisest way.

(*He goes into his bedroom.*)

SCENE VI.

CHEMINEAU, STENNE, *afterward* VAILLANT *and* ANTONIN.

CHEMINEAU (*installing himself at* PAUL'S *desk and addressing little* STENNE).

Show the gentlemen in.

(*He has taken the volume of Herscher and cuts the leaves with a huge paper-knife, lying back in the chair, his face hidden by the book. Enter Père* VAILLANT — *gray moustache, stiff, nervous, military bearing — and* ANTONIN, — *thin, spectacled, slightly bent by constant work in the laboratory, timid and embarrassed in manner.* CHEMINEAU *pops up from behind his book, like a devil from a box, smiling affably.*)

VAILLANT (*surprised*).

But — Monsieur Paul Astier —

CHEMINEAU.

As I told you, gentlemen, my friend, Paul Astier, being fully occupied by his work in the Chamber and on the Budget committee, has directed me to adjust our little difficulty.

ANTONIN (*speaking with an effort and stammering slightly*).

Probably — Monsieur Paul Astier does not know — the conditions on which — the — the — is n't that so?

VAILLANT.

Enough, enough, my boy. Let us go. Come.

CHEMINEAU.

But why not let your friend explain himself? The young man seems to me very sensible.

VAILLANT.

We have no business with you. As M. Paul Astier can't be found at home, we will go and speak to him at the Chamber. He owes it to himself to receive us. Come, Antonin.

CHEMINEAU.

Come, come, Monsieur Vaillant, you are unreasonable; you must know what an order is, you, an ex-soldier — For you certainly have been in the service.

VAILLANT (*less harshly*).

Never, monsieur, I regret to say. It was the ambition of my youthful days to be a soldier; but I had others to take care of, sisters and brothers to bring up, a widowed and infirm mother — very like the case of my godson, my good Antonin here.

CHEMINEAU (*scrutinizing* VAILLANT).

It 's a most extraordinary thing! — the gait, the carriage — why, you are more soldierly — than any soldier I ever saw.

VAILLANT.

Yes, I have played at soldiering, being unable to do anything more. (*Smiling.*) In the office they all call me *commandant.*

CHEMINEAU (*making a military salute*).

Well, then, commandant, put yourself in my place; I am simply obeying orders. M. Astier finds a tenant who will pay ten thousand francs, that is to say, eight thousand more than Madame Caussade paid. Let her keep the place if she chooses; only, she must pay the price.

VAILLANT (*tapping the table with his cane*).

Why, ten thousand devils! we have already told you the whole story. You know very well that that means ruin for those poor people.

SCENE VII.

THE SAME, PAUL ASTIER.

PAUL.

What's the matter? What are you talking about? Good-morning, gentlemen.

VAILLANT (*to Antonin*).

Speak.

ANTONIN (*dismayed*).

No, no, you.

VAILLANT.

Very good! This is the case, Monsieur Astier. When this tall fellow's father, my old friend Caussade —

PAUL (*interrupting him*).

I know — Caussade, dealer in art clocks and bronzes, 18 Rue de la Perle. I know the story.

VAILLANT (*sadly*).

You don't know it all, and I ask your leave to read you a letter, an old letter. — (*To* ANTONIN.) — Are you willing, my boy?

ANTONIN (*in an undertone*).

Read it.

VAILLANT (*reading a letter which he takes from his pocket*).

"Vaillant, old fellow — " (*Interrupting himself.*) — This is dated eight years ago; at that time I was tax-collector at Mousseaux. — (*Resuming.*) — "Vaillant, old man, I am in great trouble; I had some goods stored in my shop and I pledged them in order to meet an obligation. It was wrong, but what can you expect? — life is so hard for us small tradesmen. Caught between the mechanic and the great manufacturer, it is impossible for us to make a living. To make a long story short, if I do not refund before noon to-day, a complaint is to be lodged at the prosecuting attorney's office. It is eleven o'clock; I have not been able to do anything, and I prefer to die. When I am dead, they will not dare to prosecute, and my children's name will not be stained by my conviction. You have already done so much for us" — done so much, poor creatures! — "that I did not choose to apply to you; but I beg you to give a thought sometimes to my wife and the dear little ones I leave behind me. Above all things, try to arrange so that

Antonin, your godson, can finish his studies, and never let him go into business. It is worse than the galleys. — Let us embrace once more, old fellow, and — (*With violence.*) — And he did as he said. (*A pause.* VAILLANT *folds his letter and wipes his eyes.* ANTONIN *has turned away to conceal his emotion. Then the old official continues.*) It was under these circumstances that madame la duchesse, whose great heart is known to you, gentlemen —

CHEMINEAU.

Consented to give a ridiculous lease —

VAILLANT.

And enabled the widow to pay all the debts and bring up her three children.

ANTONIN (*in an undertone, wiping his clouded spectacles with his handkerchief*).

You helped, godfather.

VAILLANT.

Hush. I did what your father wanted; you are not in trade.

PAUL.

Trade is a fine thing, nevertheless; but one must be cut out for it, and poor M. Caussade —

ANTONIN (*with restrained wrath*).

Killed himself for his children.

VAILLANT.

That was not bad in point of stature.

ANTONIN.

Poor father! if he had only had the — the — is n't that so?

CHEMINEAU.

Eh! exactly, young man; that is just what he lacked!

PAUL (*to* VAILLANT, *pointing to* ANTONIN).

Is monsieur a doctor?

VAILLANT.

Director of the chemical laboratory at La Charité; very learned, very skilful, but he earns barely enough to live on, and can't help the family any as yet. That is why we appeal to you, Monsieur Astier.

CHEMINEAU.

In other words, you ask us to give you the interest on twelve hundred thousand francs.

VAILLANT.

It is in fulfilment of a definite promise. Madame la Duchesse Padovani said to me, Vaillant, on the front steps at Mousseaux, that so long as she lived —

PAUL.

I do not know the Duchesse Padovani, but I have full powers from Madame Paul Astier, my wife, to manage her property, and I do not consider it advisable to renew the lease on those terms. In the first place, do you know that we do not actually need the money ourselves?

VAILLANT (*smiling*).

Oh, monsieur!

PAUL.

And secondly, sentiment has no place in business. Darwin's law governs. — (*To* ANTONIN.) You, who are devoted to science, know that beautiful theory of the struggle for life, of course?

ANTONIN.

Yes. More individuals are born than can live — and the — the — in short, kill me or I kill you.

PAUL (*smiling*).

That is the law of nature, and its application in this case seems to me perfectly clear.

VAILLANT.

Our only resource, then, is to appeal to Madame Paul Astier to keep the promise made by the Duchesse Padovani.

PAUL.

As you please, but I fear that you will waste your time and the money for your journey. — (*They bow.* — *Exeunt* VAILLANT *and* ANTONIN *by the door at the back.*) Messieurs.

VAILLANT.

Monsieur.

SCENE VIII.

PAUL ASTIER, CHEMINEAU.

CHEMINEAU.

Why did you come in? I was doing very well without you.

PAUL.

I was curious to see —

CHEMINEAU.

The fiancé? That is refinement of cruelty. — (*He laughs.*) — Aha! so you have taken to stopping wedding carriages now, have you? You must have your mistresses with bridesmen and orange-blossoms, eh?

PAUL.

My dear man, women are amazing creatures. That fellow's not so bad — hard-working and intelligent.

CHEMINEAU.

He talks a little hard — "the — the — is n't that so?"

PAUL.

Yes, a timid creature, like all proud men who have had an unhappy childhood, but marriage would have limbered him up. It was all settled between the two families — the young people adored each other, and yet, I had only to raise my hand.

CHEMINEAU.

Why did you do it? Did she please you so much?

PAUL (*smiling*).

At that moment she helped on my little *combinazione*, as our friend Count Adriani says — she was a stone for my sling; women have never been anything else in my hands.

CHEMINEAU.

In that case, their marriage?

PAUL.

They never mention it now, as you can imagine.

CHEMINEAU.

And what about — "the — the — is n't it so?"

PAUL.

Well, you saw him. He does n't look very happy.

CHEMINEAU (*admiringly*).

What a fellow you are! But come, tell me this. When you happen to want one, a very pretty one or very — (*He dares not say very rich.*) — very much after your own heart, how do you go about it?

PAUL (*smiling*).

"Comment," disaient-ils,
"Sans philtres subtils
Être aimés des belles?"
"Aimez," disaient-elles.[1]

CHEMINEAU.

But you don't love them.

PAUL.

I pretend to, and in that way retain all my sang-froid. I say what it is necessary to say; I have my little repertory, very short, always the same: heart, flower, star. For you see, my boy, woman has never gone beyond romance; indeed it seems to me that she has become more romantic, more sentimental, in proportion as man has grown more brutal, and life harder.

[1] "How," said the men,
"Without subtle philters
Win the love of the fair?"
"Just love them," said the fair.

CHEMINEAU.

Ah! You might give me a little of your cunning, and it would n't take me long to bring down a handsome dowry and buy old Boutin's office, where I have been trotting about as clerk for ten years past.

PAUL.

Well, I will tell you: what injures you with women is your air of mockery; you laugh, and you ought not to; passion never jests, and the one thing of which they have a greater horror than of anything else is irony.

CHEMINEAU.

I am ironical, am I?

PAUL (*abruptly changing his tone*).

Let us go back to our figures. When everything is sold and everything paid, how much shall we have left according to your idea?

CHEMINEAU (*in an undertone, as if repeating a lesson*).

Heart, flower, star — (*Aloud.*) I count upon an income of thirty to thirty-five thousand francs, including your salary as Deputy.

PAUL.

That is just what I said — a mere trifle. Yes, a trifle. When we were married, two years ago, my wife had six hundred thousand francs a year; she is made for that sort of life, and so am I. What do you suppose will become of us now? To dabble in low politics, like a starveling, like a plowman —

CHEMINEAU.

But the idea of speculating with such a fortune!

PAUL (*taking a cigarette from the table*).

Well, here I am, with my duchess. Very pretty, my great strike! — (*He lights his cigarette.*) A bundle of old clothes and no money!

CHEMINEAU.

Oh! you go too far — a bundle of old clothes!

PAUL.

Fifty years old!

(*He offers* CHEMINEAU *a cigarette.*)

CHEMINEAU.

To be sure, the duchess — Madame Paul Astier — has changed tremendously since her marriage; she has aged ten years in two, but, when all is said, few women have so grand an air as she. Full dress suits her, and she has read a great deal! — (*Smiling.*) No money, eh? (*He lights his cigarette.*) No doubt at your age, in your position, you would have no difficulty in finding an heiress.

PAUL (*brutally*).

Damnation! I have found the heiress. — (*In an undertone.*) — This for your ear alone. Twenty years old, a Jewess, an orphan, horribly rich, and only waiting for my divorce.

CHEMINEAU.

Unfortunately, I tell you again, your wife will not consent to a divorce.

PAUL.

For what reasons?

CHEMINEAU.

In the first place, because she still loves you.

PAUL.

Do you think so?

CHEMINEAU.

I am sure of it.

PAUL (*smiling*).

In that case we can persuade her.

CHEMINEAU.

Persuade her to do what, poor woman? to be divorced?

PAUL.

Divorce for love. Napoléon and Joséphine.

CHEMINEAU.

With this difference —

PAUL.

That Joséphine was still beautiful.

CHEMINEAU.

And that he was Napoléon.

PAUL.

Bah! as if a man were not always something of a Napoléon to the woman who loves him! Yes, yes, I went about it awkwardly, with a passionate creature like her. I didn't put my foot on the right pedal — but there is time enough still — I have only to go and join her.

CHEMINEAU.

What! After all that has happened! Those terrible scenes, the scandal of your rupture, of that exile in mid-winter! Do you think that she will return?

PAUL.

If she loves me.

CHEMINEAU.

Then you will begin to live together again? — For how long, pray?

PAUL.

As long as is necessary.

CHEMINEAU.

Well, if I were in your place, I should be afraid.

PAUL.

Of her? — (*Laughing.*) — A Corsican vengeance?

CHEMINEAU.

No, of myself. — Let us see: you resume your life together, and suppose you don't succeed?

PAUL.

I shall succeed.

CHEMINEAU.

But I am supposing a case; suppose that she is obstinate, that she won't consent to a divorce.

PAUL.

Well, what then?

CHEMINEAU.

You have Herscher's new book here; have n't you read it?

PAUL.

No.

CHEMINEAU (*taking up the book and reading the title*).

Lebiez and Barré: Two Young Frenchmen of To-day. — It 's the story, you know, of the young men who murdered an old woman, a dairywoman.

PAUL.

Oh ! yes, for a few paltry sous. Idiots ! Really, their heads were n't worth any more than that. But what connection between those two curs —

CHEMINEAU.

Curs? not so bad as that ! Two young fellows like you and me, college chums, educated, intelligent, but greedy — and Darwinists to the marrow. — Why, one of them, after the deed, actually took part in a discussion at Arras explanatory of the struggle for life. The strong devours the weak ! — That 's the whole of your doctrine. (*Changing his tone.*) — What a delusion and snare these scientific theories are, my dear fellow. — (*Lowering his voice more and more.*) — How you slip and fall and allow yourself to be caught — and how fast they were caught !

PAUL.

Hoity-toity ! why, you 're mad.

CHEMINEAU.

Yes, I know — principles — honor and conscience —

PAUL.

Better than that ! — My ambition. — You cite the case of two miserable devils, with empty stomachs, gluttons who never looked beyond their immediate gratification; but I am built on a different model, I

love power, I mean to rise very high, you understand, very high. To guide men and events. It's very likely that I would slip on an orange-peel! — (*Smiling.*) — Thanks all the same for your kind intention.— (CHEMINEAU *smiles obsequiously.*) — But I am sure of myself, whatever happens. Let me think a moment. — (*He reflects.*) — Chamber to-day, Budget committee to-morrow. — Come here Sunday and you will find my wife.

CHEMINEAU.

Allow me, as I have just come from Mousseaux, still to doubt. — (*Starting.*) — Some one is knocking, Paul. — (*Pointing to the bedroom.*) — It was in that direction.

PAUL.

To be sure, I forgot the other one, who is in there. — (CHEMINEAU *starts to leave the room.*) — Wait; you can take a lesson.

SCENE IX.

THE SAME, LYDIE.

(LYDIE *is dressed handsomely, but simply; she has her hat on and her veil lowered.*)

PAUL.

Come, you can come in; this is Chemineau.

CHEMINEAU.

A friend of Paul's boyhood, mademoiselle.

LYDIE (*smiling*).

I know you very well, monsieur.

PAUL.

You find us a little disturbed, my dear child. Something has just happened — I have something to tell you.

LYDIE.

Oh! *mon Dieu!* What, in heaven's name? — (*She gazes at him, in deadly terror.*) — No, no, don't tell me! Don't tell me that it 's all over!

PAUL.

All over, no — not yet, I trust — but we must take the greatest precautions. Monsieur Vaillant just went from here, with Antonin.

LYDIE.

My father! He knows all?

PAUL.

No, I don't think so — at all events their visit had another pretext, the renewal of the Caussades' lease; but the coincidence of their presence here — certain glances which Chemineau thinks he detected — is n't that so, Chemineau? — (CHEMINEAU *assents with a nod.*) — I was alarmed, I admit. — For your sake, for my own, in my present position —

LYDIE.

And for father's too, poor man.

PAUL.

We must cease to see each other for some time.

LYDIE.

But why not over yonder — in our own apartments?

PAUL.

On Avenue Gabriel? — Not there of all places. The hare is in greater danger in the form than anywhere else.

LYDIE.

At all events I can write to you?

PAUL.

Poste restante? I count on it.

LYDIE (*in an undertone, tenderly*).

You will forget all about me, bad boy.

PAUL (*embracing her*).

Of whom shall I think then? (*Glances at* CHEMINEAU.) Are you not the star in my tempestuous sky; the little blue flower of my solitary prairie?

LYDIE (*beaming upon him as she hears the words "star" and "flower"*).

Yes, yes, I am the wicked one, my Paul. I believe you, I have faith in you. — (*Passionately and cheerfully.*) — *Au revoir, au revoir,* soon!

(*Exit* LYDIE *by the terrace at the back and the garden.* — PAUL, *who has walked to the window with her, remains there a moment, then returns.*)

SCENE X.

PAUL ASTIER, CHEMINEAU.

CHEMINEAU.

Ah! he 's a shrewd one!

PAUL (*smiling*).

You see —

CHEMINEAU.

With two words, not even three. But one must know how to say them — flower — star.

PAUL.

And above all things, don't laugh. *Au revoir*, my Chemineau. You will dine on Sunday with Napoléon and Joséphine!

ACT SECOND.

At the Château of Mousseaux. In the former Salle des Gardes. On the left, in the foreground, several steps leading to the private apartments. On the right, middle distance, in a jog-piece, an open window with a stone balcony. At the back a monumental entrance door. At the left of the door, a gallery over the Cher, receding as far as the eye can see. Large table, Renaissance chairs of various shapes. On the wall, old hangings and stands of arms.

When the curtain rises MARIA-ANTONIA and the MARQUISE DE ROCANÈRE are talking confidentially on the terrace. The marchioness is in visiting costume, MARIA-ANTONIA, bare-headed, in a dainty, dark-hued house dress.

Outside, a medley of harsh voices.

SCENE I.

MARIA-ANTONIA, MARQUISE DE ROCANÈRE

HEURTEBIZE (*outside*).

Never. I tell you no. — I won't have it, and the first person who does it again —

MARIA-ANTONIA (*leaning over the balcony*).

Well, well, will you keep quiet down there! What does all this mean, Salviati?

THE SERVANT (*outside*).

Madame, it 's the head-concierge —

SCENE II.

THE SAME, HEURTEBIZE.

(HEURTEBIZE *enters in a furious rage, his gold-laced cap in one hand, in the other a torn placard which he has pulled down.*)

HEURTEBIZE.

Yes, madame, it is I. See what they pasted on the wall by the main gate. (*He reads.*) "For sale, at auction —"

MARIA-ANTONIA (*aside*).

Mon Dieu! already.

HEURTEBIZE (*reading*).

"The estate and château of Mousseaux, furniture, vineyards, meadows, forests, islands, and mills."

MARIA-ANTONIA.

And you tore down the placard?

HEURTEBIZE.

I 'll tear down as many as they put up.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

You are wrong, my poor Heurtebize, we are going to be sold, and they must post placards.

(MADAME DE ROCANÈRE *makes a gesture of surprise.*)

HEURTEBIZE.

Mousseaux sold! Great God, is it possible? If any other than madame should tell me that, I would n't believe it.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Don't despair. — They will let you keep your gate; old retainers like you are an integral part of the estate.

HEURTEBIZE.

It is n't of myself that I am thinking, but of the pride of a family of which I have been for thirty years the faithful watch-dog, and I solicit one last favor from madame, who is always so kind.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

What is it, pray?

HEURTEBIZE.

This is Thursday, the day when the public is admitted to view the château.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Ah! yes, the servitude to which the historic châteaux are subject.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Don't you have it at Rocanère?

HEURTEBIZE (*holding up the placard which he still has in his hand*).

If I am to have such vile things as this on my great gateway, I should prefer to have somebody else show the château and do the talking.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

No, no, my fine fellow, do your duty as usual; the placards shall not be posted until to-morrow.

HEURTEBIZE (*deeply moved*).

Thanks, madame. (*Exit.*)

SCENE III.

MARIA-ANTONIA, MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE (*taking her hands*).

So it was really true, my poor dear; and I would n't believe it either.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Yes, it seems that I am ruined, but it is a disaster that hardly affects me. Rich or poor, here or elsewhere, my life is ruined, utterly ruined, and all my fortune would not restore it.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE (*in an undertone*).

Still the same old trouble?

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Yes. What madness to think of loving at my age! (*Holding out her hands and raising her eyes.*) — Why did that man happen upon my path. Why did that illusion of a new-born happiness, of beginning life afresh, come into my heart, when it was time for me to have done with all such things? (*Desperately.*) Ah! Louise, my dear Louise, you are fortunate to be young.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Young? Ask M. de Rocanère; I ceased to be young in his eyes a long while ago, and if you choose that we should talk about disdain, desertion, treachery, and falsehood, I know as well as you all that marriage promises, and how its promises are kept. Only, I made the best of it at once, and, deeming it a most creditable thing to remain a virtuous wife beside my good-for-

nothing, I sought distraction in legitimate amusements; I indulged in sport, I hunted the wolf and the fox. You don't hunt, do you, duchess?

MARIA-ANTONIA.

No.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Nor do I now; I get tired very quickly. Then I tried sculpture, but it was dirty work. Then I went in for Wagner. I was the most prominent object at Bayreuth one whole season — not two, I promise you! — After Wagner — (*Reflecting.*) — What did I do after Wagner? Oh! yes, charity, religious work — another form of sport, and a very fatiguing one, is charity. I founded asylums, orphanages, after the style of yours for little deaf mutes. My mother-in-law helped me a great deal; she is very rich, as you know, and after each new outbreak on her son's part, I was sure to see her appear with twenty, thirty, or a hundred thousand francs, according to the enormity of the escapade. — "Here my child this is for your old priests," or: "I happened to think of your soldiers' widows." — In that way the good woman kept me informed of my conjugal misfortunes as accurately as the best detective agency could have done; and as I preferred after all not to know so much, I gave up pious foundations for religion pure and simple, without works. Those who can stick to it, who can become petrified, body and soul, are the fortunate ones, but I could n't. And now, this is where I am. (*She takes a little silver case from her pocket.*) My phial of morphine, my needle.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Louise!

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

When I am bored beyond endurance, *crac!* (*She goes through the motion of pricking her arm.*) Instantly there 's a sort of rocking sensation, a little drunkenness; you think of nothing, or rather of a thousand things at once; your mind scatters, as it were, just as it does when you gaze a long time at the sea. Have you never tried it?

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Hush. Don't you know what there is at the end of this cowardly indulgence — madness and utter abdication of one's self-control? How can you?

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Bah! it 's tremendously exaggerated. In the first place, I am very careful not to increase the dose.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

No, no! You see, my poor child, being loved is the only thing of any account in life.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE (*suddenly becoming serious*).

Really? Do you think so? (*Lowering her voice.*) Well, so do I. (*In a heart-broken tone.*) Oh! if my husband had chosen —

MARIA-ANTONIA.

You can still hope: you have your youth. But with me, it is all over — all over — no more hope.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Why so? Perhaps, on the contrary, your ruin will afford an opportunity for a reconciliation.

MARIA-ANTONIA (*earnestly*).

God forbid! I have suffered too much. Oh! those two years we passed together! To feel that I was no longer attractive to him, and the difference between our ages growing greater day by day. I became jealous, deathly, murderously jealous. I dreamed of bloody vendettas like those that are fought out in our Corsican swamps, of bottles of vitriol thrown into the faces of the women whom he thought beautiful and whom I imagined I could feel prowling about my happiness.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE (*with a comical gesture of dismay*).

Terrible, was it not?

MARIA-ANTONIA.

And he, instead of trying to allay that ghastly pain, amused himself by intensifying it, thinking perhaps that he might use it as a means of deliverance, as a pretext for divorce. He is so cunning! But my last wound, the most cruel, the most insulting of all, was caused by that little Lydie Vaillant, you remember —

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE (*thunderstruck*).

Lydie! What! our ex-collector's daughter?

MARIA-ANTONIA.

I did not suspect her, God knows — I had been so kind to her and to her father, had her always about me and petted her like my own child! and then, one day, I had the proof — and such a proof! — cynical, brutal — an embrace, with arms and lips, between two doors. And when I turned the little wretch out of doors, what do you suppose my dear and loyal husband did? He procured the father's promotion and summoned his mis-

tress to Paris. That was even more convenient, you understand. Our rupture dates from that episode.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

That little Lydie! what a shameless creature! And the father knew nothing of it? I would have told him, if I had been in your place.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

The father — why, there was nothing for me to tell him; one of those blind men who live on their infirmity, and would n't be cured of it for anything in the world. Pah! what a disgusting thing life is! What would have become of me, but for this winter of solitude and tranquillity at Mousseaux? To what folly would he have driven me? And you talk about reconciliation! No, no! Besides, he desires nothing but a divorce or my death, so that he can marry a younger woman.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE (*scornfully*).

His collectress — do you think he would dare do it?

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Oh! no, she has no money; he has his eye on another, a very rich one.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

How do you know?

MARIA-ANTONIA.

From Lortigue, his secretary, a young man whom he sent to me — I am still wondering with what fiendish purpose he sent him — and whom I made my slave with a few stinging blows of my dog-whip.

SCENE IV.

THE SAME, HEURTEBIZE.

HEURTEBIZE (*joyfully*).

Monsieur Vaillant is here, madame.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

What do you say? Vaillant?

HEURTEBIZE.

Yes, madame.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Are you sure?

HEURTEBIZE.

Yes, madame.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

This is too much!

MARIA-ANTONIA.

And he wants to speak with me — with *me?* Let him come in. Ah! I am very curious.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

I will leave you.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

No, no, I beg you. You are not at all in the way.

SCENE V.

THE SAME, VAILLANT.

VAILLANT (*saluting* MARIA-ANTONIA *effusively*).

Oh! madame, madame, how happy I am to find you!

MARIA-ANTONIA (*coldly*).

Good-morning, Vaillant. Why have you come? What can I do for you?

VAILLANT (*somewhat disconcerted*).

For me, madame? I have nothing to ask for myself. You have been kind to me beyond all my desires, all my ambition. That place in Paris — that unhoped-for promotion —

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Oh! I beg you to believe that I had nothing to do with it.

VAILLANT (*dumfounded*).

What, it was not you, madame? Who could it have been, then? A great favor was bestowed on me, and I had asked for nothing.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Investigate, inform yourself.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE (*smiling*).

Some mysterious protector.

VAILLANT.

I know nobody, and I am so accustomed to owe everything to you, madame la duchesse, that when any good-fortune comes to me, I never think of any one but you. When I left Mousseaux, before going to my post in Paris, I came several times to the château but was not admitted. It was a matter of great regret to me that I had to go away without thanking you.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Do not thank me, Vaillant; I had nothing whatever to do with your new fortune.

VAILLANT.

That is very strange.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE (*in her sweetest voice*).

Perhaps mademoiselle your daughter, in her private relations

VAILLANT.

My daughter!

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

The father of a pretty girl has claims to promotion; that is administrative law!

VAILLANT (*with restrained violence, glancing at her sidewise*).

Not among us, Madame de Rocanère!

MARIA-ANTONIA.

You still live together, do you not?

VAILLANT.

Lydie and I! Why, you know, madame, that I have no one but her on earth, and she has no one but me. Oh! yes, still together, heart to heart, all by ourselves. The world is becoming so wicked. On my word, there are vipers' tongues everywhere.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

But during your office hours Lydie must be sadly bored, all alone in the house.

VAILLANT.

Humble folk do not know what it is to be bored; my daughter is always busy. Our little home is a bit of a place, but so well-kept, so dainty; it 's like her; and then she makes translations from the English and the German; she is clever at everything and so well-educated — thanks to you, madame; we don't forget that.

MARIA-ANTONIA (*gently*).

I am glad to hear it, Vaillant.

VAILLANT.

At this moment she is translating for some foreign ladies the *Memoirs* of a famous man of their country. A great patriot, or something of the sort. At all events, they are delightful people, full of consideration for Lydie; they come after her every day and take her away in their carriage, for they are bent on having the translation made under their eyes.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Indeed! (*She glances at* MARIA ANTONIA.) And do you know these foreigners; have you seen them?

VAILLANT.

No, I only know that there 's a girl of about Lydie's age, who has become a real friend to her.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

What? you have not had the curiosity — Why, if I were in your place, the idea that my daughter went off

in a carriage every day would make me fear that the great patriot would kidnap her!

VAILLANT (*fiercely*).

He is dead, madame.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Indeed!

VAILLANT.

Moreover, my daughter is n't of the sort that are kidnapped.

MARIA-ANTONIA (*hastily*).

What about the marriage you mentioned to me; is that given up?

VAILLANT (*absent-mindedly*).

Madame? — Oh! that marriage — no, she won't listen to it. I am very sorry, for he 's a fine fellow — and he loves her dearly; but only a mother can find out what goes on in those little heads, and there 's been no mother in the house for a long while.

MARIA-ANTONIA (*softened*).

It is your duty to replace her, Vaillant.

VAILLANT (*sorely disturbed*).

Oh! of course — I — Excuse me, madame, I feel a little confused — There is a sort of blame in your eyes and in your voice, and ever since I came in, it has seemed to me as if there was a purpose to wound me. I am wondering why — I am trying to think. I have always had so much respect and gratitude for you, and this reception disturbs me so —

MARIA-ANTONIA (*aside*).

Poor man! — (*Aloud.*) No, my friend, have no fear, no one here wishes ill to you; but you came at an unfortunate time. Come, sit down, Vaillant.

VAILLANT (*wiping his forehead*).

Really, madame, you have nothing against me?

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Give me your hand as your old friend, and tell me what brings you here.

VAILLANT (*still somewhat troubled*).

It's like this; I came — perhaps you remember — some time ago you let the Caussade family —

(*Two loud strokes of the bell.*)

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Ah! visitors.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

The Thursday task.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Come to my room a moment.

VAILLANT.

I am in your way, madame; I will return.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

No, no, come with me. — (*To* MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.) Are you coming, Louise? — (*In an undertone as they go up the stairs at the left.*) — I am very glad — he knows nothing, poor wretch!

SCENE VI.

HEURTEBIZE, TWO CAVALRYMEN OF THE 12TH CHASSEURS, ESTHER, COUNT ADRIANI, THE MARÉCHALE.

(*The door is thrown open violently.*)

HEURTEBIZE (*in a very loud voice*).

Visitors!

(*Then, seeing that there is no one in the room, he stands aside and lets the others pass. Enters* ESTHER — *travelling costume, very coquettish; behind her,* COUNT ADRIANI, *garde-noble, in civilian dress, powdered and pomaded, fine Italian moustache, very spruce, with the* MARÉCHALE *on his arm, dressed in widow's weeds, small hat, and long veil. — After them, English and German tourists, several bourgeois of Tours, an old peasant, and the two cavalrymen of the* 12*th Chasseurs, garrisoned in the vicinity.*)

HEURTEBIZE (*talking very fast as they file into the room*).

This, mesdames and messieurs, is the former Salles des Gardes of Catherine de' Medici, restored in the style of the sixteenth century, like the donjon which we saw just now. Fine ceilings in panels, old furniture, tapestry representing a tourney, portrait of François I., attributed to Primaticcio. — Wipe your feet, you soldiers.

FIRST CHASSEUR (*wiping his feet*).

All right, old boy, all right!

SECOND CHASSEUR.

Why are we the only ones who have to wipe our feet? That 's a strange thing.

ESTHER (*looking about her*).

Did n't those old queens of France have fine quarters? and how easy it was for them to be lovely in such a frame! What a pity to have to admire it all in such disgusting company.

THE MARÉCHALE (*in a mournful voice*).

But, my dear Esther, we had no other means of procuring admission.

COUNT ADRIANI (*with an Italian accent*).

It was of no use for me to say to the porter that madame was the widow of Field-Marshal de Sélény, the most illustrissimo soldier of Austria-Hungary, and that I am myself *garde-noble* at the Vatican; he answered all the time: "Visitors admitted only by batches."

ESTHER (*contemptuously*).

By batches! (*Pointing to* HEURTEBIZE.) What a hateful creature he is!

THE MARÉCHALE (*halting in front of the portrait of François I., and calling her niece in a trembling voice*).

Esther!

ESTHER (*unmoved*).

Yes, Aunt Kate.

(*She walks toward her.*)

THE MARÉCHALE.

Look at this portrait.

ESTHER.

Well?

THE MARÉCHALE.

Don't you see a resemblance — to him whom I mourn eternally?

ESTHER.

My uncle, the field-marshal, resembles François I.:— why, not a single feature!

THE MARSCHAL.

But it seems to me that the bearing, the carriage of the head.— Oh! I find him everywhere.

COUNT ADRIAN (*with a profound sigh*).

Poor woman!

PRINCIVAL.

This, mesdames and messieurs, is the terrace on which Louise de Vaudemont, wife of Henri III., learned — (*He runs after* ESTHER, *who is going up the stairs at the front of the stage.*) Where are you going up there? Those are the private apartments.

ESTHER (*standing at the top of the stairs, with an ingenuous air*).

Are there people living in the château now? Why, this is not the season for living in the country.

HEURTEBISE.

Whether there is anybody here or not, the public is not admitted to the apartments. Come down, I beg you.

ESTHER (*coming down, aside*).

I would like very much to see her, just to see her, to meet her eyes.

HEURTEBISE (*returning to the terrace*).

Where Louise de Vaudemont, wife of Henri III., learned of her husband's assassination by Jacques

Clément. After that she came every day to weep and muse on this spot, in her widow's weeds, which she never laid aside while she lived.

THE MARÉCHALE (*sobbing*).

Oh! *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*

COUNT ADRIANI (*dismayed, patting her hands*).

My dear — my dear — Mademoiselle Esther!

ESTHER.

What is it now?

THE MARÉCHALE.

Ah! I could not control my emotion. That unhappy queen — the similarity of our lots —

ESTHER.

Nonsense, Aunt Kate, my uncle was not murdered.

THE MARÉCHALE.

Mourning for a great man and mourning for a king — is n't it about the same thing? Has not the consort of the great patriot, of the great vanquished of Carinthia, also remained faithful to her vow of eternal tears?

HEURTEBIZE (*leading the way from the terrace to the gallery*).

We pass now into the music-room over the river, built by Diane de Poitiers. — (*Changing his tone and pointing to the* MARÉCHALE.) — If that lady is tired and wishes to rest a moment, we will take her up again when we return. — (*Resuming his harangue.*) — Old wainscot-

ing, pictures by the great masters, music-stands of carved iron-work, rebecks and *violes d'amour*. Be kind enough to follow, mesdames and messieurs; wipe your feet, you soldiers.

(*Exit by the gallery.*)

FIRST CHASSEUR.

All right, old boy, all right!

SECOND CHASSEUR.

It 's a strange thing to have to wipe our feet so often.

THE MARÉCHALE (*to her niece and* ADRIANI).

Go without me, I beg. — (*She rises.*) — I would like to weep and muse a moment on this terrace of sorrowful memory, to rest my grief on the same spot as the poor queen.

ESTHER (*to* ADRIANI).

Stay with her, Pepino.

COUNT ADRIANI.

Why, I would prefer to be with you.

ESTHER.

Naturally, but you are the Maréchale's cavalier, not mine.

COUNT ADRIANI.

Cruel!

ESTHER.

I will come right back, Aunt Kate. I will find you in your little weeping-room.

(*Exit* ESTHER *by the gallery.*)

SCENE VII.

THE MARÉCHALE, COUNT ADRIANI, *afterward* ESTHER.

COUNT ADRIANI (*looking after* ESTHER *with flashing eyes*).

Cristo! how lovely she is! — (*Lowering his voice and his eyes.*) — And *simpatica* above all. — (*He approaches the terrace where the* MARÉCHALE *is sitting with her head resting on her elbow, facing the audience in a sentimental pose.*) — Madame la Maréchale.

THE MARÉCHALE (*in a wailing tone and with tears in her eyes*).

Dear count!

COUNT ADRIANI.

Are n't you afraid of taking cold under the balcony? You could weep as comfortably inside. The April sun is so treacherous.

THE MARÉCHALE (*in a natural voice*).

Indeed, you are right, I am shivering all over.

(*She rises and re-enters the Salle des Gardes.*)

COUNT ADRIANI.

It is a little early in the season for country excursions.

THE MARÉCHALE.

It 's one of that spoiled child's whims, a visit to the châteaux of Touraine. If we finally settle in France, she dreams of passing the summer in one of these royal residences.

COUNT ADRIANI.

A real little queen, Mademoiselle Esther; but to keep up a house like this requires a large fortune.

THE MARÉCHALE.

Hers is considerable.

COUNT ADRIANI (*aside*).

Yes, yes, *simpatica, molto simpatica!*

THE MARÉCHALE.

The Sélénys of Buda-Pesth were brothers — my husband, the field-marshal, and Esther's father, who was governor of the Imperial Bank. They both died a few years ago, leaving a two-fold magnificent heritage, one of millions of money, the other of pure glory. My niece and I share what they left behind. She administers and adds to her father's property.

COUNT ADRIANI (*with interest*).

Ah! she adds to it?

THE MARÉCHALE.

He was a wonderful man of business.

COUNT ADRIANI (*with enthusiasm*).

Yes, yes, those things are in the blood.

THE MARÉCHALE.

For my part, I am entirely devoted to a cherished and illustrious memory. (*She takes his hands effusively.*) Ah! monsieur le comte, a great man's widow — What an honor — but what duties it entails — what duties! — Any other woman at my age would still have a right to aspire to happiness, to love.

COUNT ADRIANI (*aside*).

Cristo!

THE MARÉCHALE.

For we women are not like you, messieurs. We begin much later.

COUNT ADRIANI (*aside*).

That depends!

THE MARÉCHALE.

And in our mature years we retain a savor of youth, a reserve of innocence, of expansiveness. You can't imagine! But, so far as I am concerned, what can I do? This glorious name to bear, this celebrity for which I am responsible, means renunciation before my time — the cloister. (*She feels for her handkerchief, but without relaxing her hold of his hands.*)

COUNT ADRIANI (*somewhat annoyed*).

Poor woman!

THE MARÉCHALE.

Unless I should meet a noble-hearted man, who would be willing to share the responsibility of my heavy task and allow me to remain a widow morally speaking, while accepting what I am able to give him.

COUNT ADRIANI (*trying to free himself*).

You will have difficulty in finding such a man.

ESTHER (*who has returned and is looking toward the apartments, pauses near the table. — Aside*).

To think that she was here just now! — (*Looking at a book on the table.*) — She was reading this book, doubtless, when we came in. This unfinished embroidery is hers perhaps. I am in her house, in her life. (*Violently.*) Yes! in her very life — and we do not know each other. (*She laughs.*) God! how amusing it is! (*She approaches*

the MARÉCHALE, *who is blowing her nose with emotion.*) Well, Aunt Kate, have n't we finished making our eyes red? — Come, come — your hero was n't agreeable every day; indeed, he was a great brute, was my poor uncle — don't forget that. You were about to sue for a divorce when he died.

THE MARÉCHALE.

It is true that he deceived me much and beat me, but it was my lot as a great man's wife; as he himself used to say to me: "Respect the foibles of a god!"

ESTHER (*absent-mindedly, with her eyes fixed on the door at the right*).

I do not want to go away without seeing her! — (*To* ADRIANI.) — You used to know her, did n't you, Pepino?

COUNT ADRIANI.

Who, the marshal?

ESTHER.

No, Madame Paul Astier, when she was the Duchesse Padovani?

COUNT ADRIANI.

Yes, yes, I knew her three years ago, when I came to Paris with the ablegate about the cardinal's berretta.

ESTHER.

Oh! yes, the famous berretta, which you lost — left somewhere or other.

THE MARÉCHALE (*in an undertone*).

At the room of a little Parisienne whom he met at the railway station.

COUNT ADRIANI (*with a becomingly hypocritical air*).

It was a sad misfortune. When we alighted from the carriage, Monseigneur he say to me: "Pepino, take the berretta." I already had the *souquetto*, you know, the little cap; with the berretta that made two. Then I — lost myself in those great halls — and I did not find myself again until the next morning.

THE MARÉCHALE (*mimicking his accent*).

And I did not know at what little damsel's house I had left the berretta and *souquetto*.

ESTHER (*absent-mindedly*).

Was she still pretty in those days?

COUNT ADRIANI (*in dismay*).

The lady of the railway station?

ESTHER.

No, the duchess.

COUNT ADRIANI.

Cristo! how lovely she was! (*Lowering his eyes.*) And *simpatica* above all things.

ESTHER.

Nonsense! all women are lovely and *simpatica* in your eyes — (*She has passed him and walked toward the terrace.*) I say, Aunt Kate, what a noble mausoleum for the marshal!

THE MARÉCHALE.

A mausoleum — where, pray?

ESTHER (*pointing*).

Yonder on that little green island in the Cher — it would be superb.

THE MARÉCHALE.

But they would not allow it, my child. We should have to own the property.

ESTHER.

Exactly — and I am strongly tempted to buy it. This historic Mousseaux takes my fancy. It would amuse me to walk in the parks that belonged to those queens of France, to sweep with my skirts the same flag-stones that their brocade-trains once swept.

THE MARÉCHALE (*musing*).

In very truth, a commemorative column, which could be seen from a long distance: "To the great vanquished of Carinthia." — Well, my dear child, make up your mind.

ESTHER.

My mind is all made up; give me one of your cards. (*The* MARÉCHALE *passes her a card with an exaggerated black border.*) Oh! have n't you any in lighter mourning, less heavily draped?

THE MARÉCHALE (*profoundly moved*).

They can never be too heavily draped.

SCENE VIII.

THE SAME, HEURTEBIZE, *the* TWO CHASSEURS, TOURISTS.

HEURTEBIZE (*coming in from the gallery and placing a register on the table*).

This way, please, messieurs and mesdames. If any one of the company would like to write his name in the

Mousseaux book of gold, here it is. It is customary to write the name and a sentiment — (*To the soldiers.*) — anything that occurs to you.

FIRST CHASSEUR.

A sentiment — All right, old boy.

SECOND CHASSEUR (*scratching his head*).

That 's a strange thing!

(*The tourists crowd around the table.*)

ESTHER.

What, aunt! do you mean — ?

THE MARÉCHALE.

Not for myself, my child, but wherever I can write his name —

ESTHER (*motioning to* HEURTEBIZE, *while the others are at the table*).

One word, please. Is Madame Paul Astier visible?

HEURTEBIZE.

Oh! no. Madame has not received at all this winter.

ESTHER.

Can you not hand her this card?

HEURTEBIZE (*deferentially, after reading the card*).

I do not know — I will go and see.

ESTHER.

Say that it is about purchasing the château.

HEURTEBIZE (*violently*).

The château is n't for sale.

ESTHER.

But I have been told —

HEURTEBIZE (*in a rage*).

The château is n't for sale. That 's enough. This way out.

FIRST CHASSEUR (*writing his sentiment on the register*).

More than nine hundred and thirteen days to do.

HEURTEBIZE.

Come, come! make haste.

(*Exeunt. — Two loud strokes of the bell.*)

ESTHER. (*As she is passing through the door she stops and says to* HEURTEBIZE.)

Oh! I beg your pardon, I did not sign.

(*She returns to the table and stoops to write in the register.*)

SCENE IX.

MARIA-ANTONIA *and* MADAME DE ROCANÈRE (*appearing at the top of the small staircase at the left*); ESTHER (*who is stooping over to write and does not see them*) — HEURTEBIZE (*at the back of the stage, bunch of keys in his hand, standing impatiently by the open door*).

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Ah! my dear friend, you will always be the duchess.

MARIA-ANTONIA (*descending the stairs*).

You understand, I promised those Caussades. I may be ruined, but I cannot break my promise.

ESTHER (*at the table, rising*).

There she is!

(*She spies* MARIA-ANTONIA. *The two women look at each other for an instant, without bowing or speaking.*)

HEURTEBIZE (*jingling his keys*).

This way out!

MARIA-ANTONIA (*to the* MARCHIONESS).

Who is that?

ESTHER (*retiring triumphantly*).

Well, I have seen her.

(*She laughs wickedly. Exit* ESTHER. HEURTEBIZE *follows her out and closes the door violently.*)

SCENE X.

MARIA-ANTONIA, MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Why that evil glance?

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Her name should be on the book. — (*She looks and reads aloud.*) — "Comtesse Esther de Sélény, Buda-Pesth."

MARIA-ANTONIA (*aside*).

Is it possible?

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE, (*contemptuously*).

Comtesse Esther! — nobility of the ghetto, I suppose.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Do you know who that is? The future Madame Paul Astier.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Madame Astier?

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Only, they will have to wait until I am dead, and I venture to hope —

SCENE XI.

THE SAME, PAUL ASTIER.

PAUL (*standing at the top of the stairway leading to the private apartments at the left*).

At last — here they are.

MARIA-ANTONIA (*starting back*).

Ah!

PAUL (*coming forward with a nonchalant air*).

I thought that you were in your own room, my dear. (*Bowing to* MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.) Marchioness, the country air agrees with you wonderfully. Upon my word, you both are as blooming as the flowers.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Nobody believes you any more, you pretty fibber. Adieu!

(*She kisses her friend.*)

PAUL.

What! are you going?

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

I have been here two hours.

PAUL.

But I have n't.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Adieu, adieu — (*Aside.*) There 's no gainsaying it, he is perfectly charming.

SCENE XII.

PAUL ASTIER, MARIA-ANTONIA.

PAUL (*returns after escorting* MADAME DE ROCANÈRE *to the door, goes up to his wife and takes her hand*).

PAUL.

Good-morning, Mari'-Anto.

MARIA-ANTONIA (*severely withdrawing her hand*).

Good-morning, Monsieur Paul Astier.

PAUL (*smiling*).

Oho! (*He looks at her closely.*) Those haughty eyebrows joined, those quivering nostrils. So we are still in our Corsican swamps, are we? The vendetta is still on?

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Come, come, my dear, let there be no make-believe between us. We are alone, and we know each other.

PAUL (*smiling*).

Are you quite sure that you know me?

MARIA-ANTONIA.

So well that the thought of you is disgusting, nauseating to me!

PAUL (*still smiling*).

I will not tell you, according to the absurd formula now in vogue, that you are unparliamentary. On the contrary, you are in the fashion, quite in the fashion. Go on, then, I beg. I will fancy I 'm at a sitting of the Chamber. (*He sits down.*) So you know me through and through, do you, Maria-Antonia? Since when, pray?

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Oh! of course, I lose my head, and then I throw everything away in my violence. But you are calm, you are strong. Let us see if I cannot be the same. (*She sits down.*) Since when have I known you, my dear Paul? It will be three years the last of next October — six months hence.

PAUL (*still smiling*).

You are exact at all events. It was before our marriage, then?

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Yes — on that day we walked in the park yonder. (*She waves her hand toward the park.*) You talked to me about your love; I told you of my life with the duke, my first husband, and of the long martyrdom I had endured down to his death. It was a very mild day,

the sun was partly veiled and cast a pale light on the bare lawns. We were seated near the summer-house. And while you were saying words of love to me, as I leaned against you, my hand in yours, your head on my shoulder — suddenly, at a word — was it as much as a word? — I saw clearly, I understood. What tempted you in me was this fine domain, my fortune, my influence, but not the woman. You did not love me — (*A heart-broken smile.*) You did not love me. I had a ghastly moment. My eyes closed as if before death. Your voice seemed to come from a distance, all confused, and at the same time I heard the leaves falling all over the park, in the autumn breeze — some slowly, still heavy with sap, others stealthily and lightly. It was as if there were footsteps around the summer-house, the trampling of a silent crowd, a routed army flying. And it was all myself, the crumbling of my blissful dream.

PAUL.

I understood you so well, my dear love, that I went away the next morning.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Yes, went away so that I should run after you! Which I did of course. And again that very morning, in that furious gallop across country, leaning over my horse's neck, watching for the train that was to carry you away, what do you suppose I said to myself? — "You are a great fool to hurry so, my poor duchess! If you should go at a foot-pace, at the slowest walk, you would be sure to overtake him, for he is your evil destiny, the destiny that one never escapes." You can see whether I knew you, my dear Paul.

PAUL.

Still, I returned only at your urgent entreaty. You begged me, implored me: "Come back; I will be your wife."

MARIA-ANTONIA.

I became your wife; I afforded the world the spectacle of the degradation of the Duchesse Padovani into Madame Paul Astier, marrying her architect who did not love her. And of all the days of my life, which has seen many dismal and sorrowful days, not one has ever wrung my heart like the day of my marriage. You remember that clerk at the mayor's office who said to me with a pleasant smile, looking me in the face: "We are only waiting for the bride."—And I was the bride! At the church too! That chapel on Rue de Vaugirard, brightly lighted, filled with flowers, and utterly deserted—and the worldly priest, in a violet pelerine, reading a printed address which prated of nothing but "the honorable traditions of the husband's family and the juvenile charms of the bride." (*She laughs bitterly.*) How appropriate that was! Tell me, if I had n't known you, should I have noticed those things?—Believe what I say! I had measured the gulf, and I jumped into it with my eyes open, in order not to break my word.

PAUL.

No, Maria-Antonia, but simply because you loved me. And it is unworthy of you to deny, to blaspheme love. So many women die without knowing it!

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Yes, I have had a taste of love, but I have paid for it with cruel suffering. Oh! I do not complain, I make

no accusations, I ask for nothing. But look at yonder terrace and remember that I have never lied to you. When I sought refuge here, three months ago, in the first days of my exile and my solitude, every day I had the same mad temptation to jump over the rail and dash my brains out on the steps below. Luckily I am a believer; and then, too, what would the world have said? — At my age — a woman of my rank — commit suicide like an abandoned grisette! — With God's help, I was able to resist, to calm my emotion in the bosom of nature, and to forget you.

PAUL (*drawing nearer to her*).

Forget me! Can that be possible? Can two people who have been so absolutely bound up in each other ever forget each other? No, no! I do not believe you. Even when you pray, I glide into your prayers; and at night when you are all alone here, looking at the stars through your tears, I am sure that the stars speak to you of me.

MARIA-ANTONIA (*shuddering*).

Ah! my God! he is beginning again. He is going to torture me anew. In heaven's name, leave the poor creature at peace who has suffered so much through you!

PAUL (*in an undertone, very near to her*).

But if I do not choose that she shall suffer any more, if I mean to atone for the pain I have caused her?

MARIA-ANTONIA (*tearing herself away from him with a vigorous effort*).

It is not true. I will tell you why you have come here, what you want to obtain from me: I am in your way;

I am the stool which is of no further use and is kicked aside. Divorce, is it not? (*With clenched teeth.*) So that you can marry your Austrian gold woman.

PAUL (*a little surprised to find her so well informed*).

What! Who has told you that cock-and-bull story? I have met Mademoiselle de Sélény once or twice at the Austrian embassy, but never in my life —

MARIA-ANTONIA.

It is useless; I know all about it.

PAUL.

In the first place, those ladies have left Paris.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

True, and I just saw your doll. She is really very pretty. Unfortunately, you will not be able to marry her. For there is one thing which you may as well fix in your mind, drive it in as you drive a nail with a hammer, and that is that we shall never be divorced; do you understand? — never! There was scandal enough about our marriage; I will not afford an excuse for any more. Yes, I know, Monsieur Chemineau told me — Nothing could be easier — A court willing to oblige, just a letter to write — cruelty and outrageous insults — but I should consider such a comedy beneath me. For all that your legislators can do, my dear, divorce is not a law, it is a blot on the law. As a Frenchwoman and a Christian, I refuse to submit to it. The Church united us, let the Church part us, dissolve our marriage; but so long as it has not released me from my oath, sorry as I am for you, I propose to remain, until death, your most faithful and devoted wife.

PAUL (*smiling and very calm*).

I ask nothing better. Great God! yes, what I want, what I came here to seek, is yourself, my wife, whom I have lost and whom I long to take back to my heart.

MARIA-ANTONIA (*eagerly*).

Take me back! Why?

PAUL.

Because I miss my companion, because I need her, and because the support of her intelligent and unswerving devotion has never been so necessary to me as at this moment. I appeal to your kindness of heart, Maria-Antonia, to your womanly generosity. Come back to Paris, to me. You cannot remain here, as the estate is to be sold. Let us begin a new life. I am an Under-Secretary of State, have I told you? — As I am obliged to give receptions, to live in a style which is made difficult by the scantiness of our present resources, we cannot make both ends meet unless we are sensible and live on cordial terms. Help me; I am in distress and I appeal to you.

MARIA-ANTONIA (*very haughtily*).

To return to you and meet your mistresses! many thanks! — (*With an outburst of jealous rage.*) — Don't lie to me; that Lydie was there only the other morning — under my roof! in my house!

PAUL.

The persons who keep a journal of my private life for you and send it to you regularly should have told you that the visit to which you refer was followed by an absolute and irrevocable dismissal.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

So I was told — but what of it? After that one there will be another.

PAUL.

I swear —

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Don't swear — I know you.

PAUL. (*He has taken her hand.*)

Listen to me, Maria-Antonia; I have clung to my youthful habits a long while, too long. That was my only offence against you; all the sorrow I have caused you has been due to that. To-day, having cooled down, being more serious-minded, more of a man, I propose to put an end to the misunderstanding between us.

MARIA-ANTONIA (*bitterly*).

Of course!

(*She tries to free herself.*)

PAUL (*detaining her*).

Let us be the two fingers of the hand, united in the same gesture and seeking the same end.

MARIA-ANTONIA (*half persuaded*).

All these fine arguments I used upon myself when we married. I am still weeping over them!

PAUL (*in a low, very tender voice*).

And later, who knows? — when your confidence in me has returned —

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Hush! hush! — never!

PAUL (*in the same tone*).

Mari'-Anto! Mari'-Anto! Dear heart!

MARIA-ANTONIA (*suddenly freeing herself, in a resolute tone*).

Ah! charmer, who read in the depths of my soul, and still remain illegible to me! Is it true? is it really true? You really need me? I can be of some use to you? Very well! I am ready to go with you, my dear.

ACT THIRD.

In VAILLANT'S house.

A bright, simply-furnished dining-room. Door at the back opening into a reception-room, also very light, from which the kitchen opens; the table is laid for Père VAILLANT'S breakfast. A huge bunch of lilies-of-the-valley between the two plates. Teapot, cups, cold meat. On the walls, lithographs of battles, portraits of generals. A pile of plates and a dish of cherries on the great porcelain stove.

SCENE I.

LYDIE (*alone*).

(*There is no resemblance between the pretty, half-clad girl of the first act and this dainty housewife in her great English apron, with her skirt and sleeves turned up, pouring boiling water into the teapot. A ring at the bell, which she seems to have been expecting.*)

LYDIE.

Ah! here he is! (*She hurries from the room.*) Don't disturb yourself, Mère André, I am here. (*As she passes, she closes the door of the kitchen.*) But do keep your kitchen door closed.

(*She opens the outer door, admits a messenger, and hastily closes the door behind them.*)

SCENE II.

LYDIE, THE MESSENGER.

LYDIE (*in an undertone*).

Did you see him?

THE MESSENGER (*in the same tone*).

Yes, mademoiselle.

LYDIE.

Did you speak to him — to himself?

THE MESSENGER.

To himself, on the steps of the department. I watched for his carriage as you told me, and when he stepped out I handed him the letter.

LYDIE.

Did he read it?

THE MESSENGER.

Hardly. (*With a rapid gesture.*) Just like that!

LYDIE.

And the answer?

THE MESSENGER.

There is no answer.

LYDIE.

Very well, thanks. (*She pays him.*) Good-morning. Never mind — never mind, I will close the door.

(*Exit the messenger, leaving the door of the reception-room open. When she has made sure that he has gone, she closes the door.*)

SCENE III.

LYDIE.

No answer. (*She walks slowly to the chair by the table and sits down.*) He is right. Why should he have answered me? What could he say to me that he has n't said already? The duchess has come back, she has resumed her place, it 's simple enough. The poor woman has suffered enough, it 's my turn to suffer a little now. (*She rises, goes and gets the cups, places them on the table, and walks to the centre of the stage.*) And yet, no, no — his eyes were so kind the last time — he bade me adieu so affectionately, I feel — something warns me — no, it is not the end — that last stab in the heart which one cannot survive. — (*The bell rings. She wipes her eyes and calls.*) — Somebody is ringing, Mère André; go to the door.

(*She bustles about the table with ostentatious zeal.*)

A WOMAN'S VOICE (*in the reception-room*).

Mademoiselle Vaillant!

LYDIE.

That voice!

(*The door of the reception-room opens.*)

SCENE IV.

LYDIE, ESTHER, A FOOTMAN (*in gorgeous livery*).

ESTHER (*standing in the reception-room, while the footman removes her cloak*).

Good-morning, you.

LYDIE.

Mademoiselle Esther!

ESTHER (*still in the reception-room*).

I might have written to you to tell you I had returned, but it would have taken too long. What a lot of stairs! I never climbed so high. (*She enters the dining-room.*) Kiss me, if you are willing.

LYDIE (*kissing her and turning down her sleeves*).

I beg your pardon for receiving you in such a dress —

ESTHER.

Why, it 's very pretty — with your hair brushed back, and that striped apron, you look as if you had come out of an English novel.

LYDIE.

I have to help a little about the housekeeping; we have only one good-for-nothing old maid-servant, half deaf.

ESTHER.

Paskevitch here (*pointing to the footman, who has remained in the reception-room*) frightened her to death when we came in, and she fled to her kitchen. For whom is the table set so prettily, with those lilies-of-the-valley? Are you expecting your lover?

LYDIE.

Oh! my lover —

ESTHER.

Yes, I know, you were cut out of the purest, clearest cake of ice that ever was; but look out for yourself some day when the thaw comes!

LYDIE (*with an embarrassed smile*).

I am expecting nobody but my father; it is time for him.

ESTHER.

I shall be very glad to know Monsieur Vaillant. Is he an ex-soldier? — (*Pointing to the walls.*) — I noticed all these battles — these weapons!

LYDIE.

No, my father was never in the army. But he has the heart of a soldier, of a hero, none the less; he is the personification of honor, self-sacrifice, discipline. But he missed his vocation, like so many other men. He consoles himself by looking at pictures. But that doesn't always suffice to cheer him up. For some time past the poor man has been unusually pensive and gloomy. What can you expect? it is the everlasting lack of harmony between the dream and the reality, between what one has and what one wants, which sooner or later discourages one with living.

ESTHER.

Well! dream and reality have always coincided in my life. I have obtained all that I wanted, up to the present time at least. (*Looking at the stove.*) Your cherries tempt me, may I have one?

LYDIE.

Surely.

ESTHER (*nibbling at a cherry and pacing up and down the room*).

I don't know what 's the matter with me this morning. I can't keep still. I am as nervous — and all of a tremble.

LYDIE (*gently*).

What is the matter?

ESTHER (*gayly*).

Nothing; I am mad, that 's all. Oh! not real madness, not bad enough to be shut up; but what I call "the superintendent's garden," a sort of *tourneboulage*. That surprises you, you are so placid and calm.

LYDIE.

You have some sorrow — tell me.

ESTHER (*after a pause*).

You would not understand my sorrow at all — in the first place, it is principally anger.

LYDIE.

Very well, be angry, scold.

ESTHER.

I am too much alone in Paris. I have no one to confide in.

LYDIE.

Not the maréchale?

ESTHER.

The maréchale is very fond of me, but how am I to make her leave her funeral urn and her great man's ashes? I have but one real friend, my dear (*taking her hand*), one friend, true and loyal, but so reserved, so reasonable —

LYDIE.

Oh! do I seem like that?

ESTHER.

That I am always afraid of frightening her.

LYDIE (*smiling*).

But how about that young man?

ESTHER.

What young man?

LYDIE.

You told me not long ago that you had a very warm feeling for some one.

ESTHER.

Very warm, in truth.

LYDIE (*smiling*),

I have a suspicion that I know who he is—I have often met him at your house.

ESTHER.

At our house! he never comes there.

LYDIE.

Is it not Count Adriani?

ESTHER.

Nonsense! that popinjay! (*Mimicking the garde-noble's voice.*) "Cristo! how lovely she is!" No, thanks; the man I have chosen, the man I desire for my master, is a real master, one of those fearless, stern-eyed creatures before whom all women prance and all men crouch like dogs. Ah! what can we two not do together!—unfortunately, he is not free.

LYDIE.

A liaison?

ESTHER.

Oh! that would be nothing; but he is married; a deplorable marriage in every respect. They were to be divorced not long ago, then there was some underhand scheming, I don't know what, and they have come together again, reconciled. Oh! these Frenchmen! they are as light as straw. I learned what had happened, on my return, from a few words in the "personals" in a newspaper: "Cannot meet for some time; patience and confidence." Not a word more. I fairly wept with rage.

LYDIE.

Why weep? Patience and confidence — the whole of love is in those two words.

ESTHER.

I cannot wait.

LYDIE.

Because you do not know how to love.

ESTHER.

I love him all the same, and I will have no other man. He is so handsome, so stylish — and what makes him all the dearer to me is that I knew you through him.

LYDIE (*in dismay*).

What! it is —?

ESTHER.

Paul Astier, the Under-Secretary of State. You remember that, one evening at the Embassy, when the

maréchale was inquiring for some one to translate memoirs —

LYDIE.

Yes, yes, I remember. And does he love you? Has he often told you so?

ESTHER (*laughing*).

Very often.

LYDIE.

But where, as he never went to your house, nor you to his, I suppose?

ESTHER.

Oh! no, you are right; he lived apart from his wife, but always under surveillance; his wife is such a hateful, ugly creature! she would n't consent to a divorce, would do anything to prevent our marriage. So we met on the sly, which doubled the pleasure; sometimes at the theatre, at the Bois every morning — flirting on horseback is so delicious, don't you think so, little one?

LYDIE.

I have had no experience.

ESTHER.

Of course not; how stupid I am.

LYDIE.

So the duchess — (*Correcting herself.*) — Madame Astier suspects nothing?

ESTHER.

She did not when I went away, at all events. Fancy that, in order to elude her spies more readily, he in-

vented an intrigue, a romantic love-affair, which he took no pains to conceal, with a young woman — one of those whom men don't marry, you understand.

LYDIE.

One of those whom men don't marry. (*Taking her hands nervously.*) And are you sure, Esther, that he would marry you if he obtained his divorce?

ESTHER (*artlessly*).

He would be compelled to marry me in order to have me.

LYDIE (*crushed*).

Of course.

ESTHER.

Can it be that his wife is suspicious now? Perhaps she has learned what that mock intrigue concealed. At all events she has put her hand on it. Oh! but I don't surrender — I am a fighter! In the first place, I have many more trumps in my hand than she has. I am young, I am rich, and his wife is no longer either.

LYDIE (*leaning against a chair to keep from falling*).

Surely, no one can contend with such a rival as you.

SCENE V.

THE SAME, VAILLANT.

VAILLANT (*entering the room, with a frown on his brow, and glancing suspiciously behind him at the tall footman in the reception-room. — Between his teeth*).

What is that tall rascal doing here?

LYDIE.

Father — this is Mademoiselle Esther de Sélény.

VAILLANT (*dumfounded; his gloomy expression gradually giving place to a smile*).

What? then it was true?

(*He hastily removes his hat.*)

ESTHER (*holding out her hand*).

Good-morning, Monsieur Vaillant. (*She points laughingly to the reception-room.*) My footman is rather an obstruction, is n't he?

VAILLANT (*taking her hand*).

So it is you, it is really you? Oh, mademoiselle!

ESTHER.

I take him to please Aunt Kate, who is as afraid of this Paris of yours as she is of the devil.

VAILLANT (*slightly confused*).

Oh! yes, madame your aunt — But how overjoyed I am! you cannot imagine my joy, my delight. See, I am still looking at you.

ESTHER.

Do I look as you expected? Am I like what she has told you about me? (*She points to the motionless, distraught Lydie.*)

VAILLANT.

Yes, but I prefer — one never believes that things are as they are described to him.

ESTHER.

I have come to take Lydie away again. We go to work on the *Memoirs* to-morrow. — (*To Lydie.*) — The great patriot 's a great bore — eh, my poor dear?

VAILLANT (*uneasily*).

Ah ! is the great patriot with you?

ESTHER.

With us? I should say so. He never leaves us for a minute. No one ever saw a dead man so — how do you say it in Parisian? — so clinging.

VAILLANT (*laughing heartily*).

Why, to be sure, he is dead; I forgot that he was dead.

ESTHER.

And more alive than ever. His hat, gloves, and cane in the reception-room, as if he were in the house, as if he were just going out, and a cover always laid for him morning and night; you can imagine how cheerful it is with that place always unoccupied, and how glad I am when my dear Lydie comes and takes a meal with us. And then there are busts everywhere, portraits, *ex-votos*, just the same at Paris as at Vienna. We travel with all the properties.

VAILLANT (*gayly*).

What a wicked creature !

ESTHER.

Nonsense ! in reality my aunt was never so happy as she has been since her loss. If you could hear her sometimes when we are alone — such childlike joy, such

[illegible] and good-humour. But for the gallery, she's a great man's widow, and above all things the slave of her fellow-creatures. How can you expect her to say to the servants, "Remove the hat of the deceased from the reception-room," or, "The late marshal will not breakfast this morning?"

VALLANT (*laughing*).

In truth, it is rather a dilemma; but it occurs to me, mademoiselle, that you have not the same reasons as the marshal for not breakfasting; suppose you breakfast here, with your friends, without ceremony?

ESTHER (*confused*).

Oh! father—

ESTHER (*smiling with a suggestion of mockery*).

Thanks, Monsieur Vallant. I should certainly enjoy it exceedingly: but just imagine my poor aunt tête-à-tête with her hero! No, no, I must run; until to-morrow, my dear: the carriage will come for you early.

VALLANT (*escorting her to the door*).

I did not see your carriage below — did you come on foot, pray?

ESTHER.

I adore it — people turn and look. I made a commotion all along the Temple. (*To the servant.*) Pardonnez, my child. (*Standing in the doorway of the reception-room and watching them while her cloak is being put on.*) At all events, I am very glad that I came here, the little table, those two covers, Lydie with her great apron — this is a picture of Paris which we foreign-

ers never suspect, which your authors never mention. Adieu. (*She goes out, escorted by* VAILLANT *to the landing.*) Au revoir, Monsieur Vaillant.

LYDIE (*still motionless, aside*).

I have received the last stab now, fair in the heart.

SCENE VI.

VAILLANT, LYDIE.

VAILLANT (*gazing at her, deeply moved*).

Lydie.

LYDIE.

Father.

VAILLANT (*opening his arms*).

Embrace me; embrace your old fool of a father. (*He strains her to his heart.*) Oh! that I should have suspected you, such a straightforward, simple-hearted creature — as if I didn't know you — as if you were not above any sort of suspicion!

LYDIE (*trying to free herself and turning away her head*).

But I have no idea —

VAILLANT.

I can well believe that you have no idea, and I shall never dare to tell you of the mad thoughts that have haunted my poor head for the last week! And I assumed to replace your mother, to give you the sweet boon of maternal affection and care which you have hardly known at all! Nonsense! as if a mother could

ever have entertained such ideas concerning her daughter! As if a man could ever replace a mother! (*With passion.*) Oh! stay there a moment and repeat after me, very low, lest any one should hear: "Father, I forgive you."

LYDIE.

But —

VAILLANT.

Yes, yes; I insist. Say — "Father — "

LYDIE (*under her breath*).

Father —

VAILLANT.

"I forgive you."

ANTONIN (*outside*).

Godfather!

(*Lydie kisses her father and runs to her room.*)

VAILLANT (*joyfully*).

Ah! she has forgiven me.

SCENE VII.

VAILLANT, ANTONIN.

VAILLANT.

What, you! (*Going to meet him.*) Ah! my friend, how happy I am!

ANTONIN (*in an undertone*).

And I too, godfather. Where is she?

VAILLANT.

In her bedroom.

ANTONIN.

It is done.

VAILLANT.

Ah! so he fell into line, did he?

ANTONIN.

He did indeed — he thinks a good deal of his skin, does our M. Lortigue. If you could have seen him! I took big Meunier with me, my chum at the laboratory, because he has the most — the — the — is n't that so? He talked and I made the gestures. However, it did n't take long. Fight or sign.

VAILLANT.

And he signed?

ANTONIN.

With the greatest delight.

VAILLANT.

The deuce! it is written that I shall never do any fighting, not even as a civilian. He signed without changing anything, I suppose?

ANTONIN.

Not a comma; see for yourself.

(*He passes him a paper.*)

VAILLANT (*half reading, half mumbling*).

"I, the undersigned, declare that the remarks made by me at the Excise office, before the employés of the third division, concerning Mademoiselle Vaillant and her father — mm — mm — mm — and that in making them I was guilty of falsehood and dastardly conduct.

Lortigue." (*Hesitatingly.*) Do you think that is strong enough?

ANTONIN (*laughing*).

What in heaven's name do you want? Never fear, M. Lortigue won't say again that you have protectors in the ministry. Who is this Lortigue?

VAILLANT.

A petty clerk transferred from our department to the interior. Indeed, I believe he is connected with Astier's office.

ANTONIN (*between his teeth*).

In that case he is complete!

VAILLANT.

Never mind. To think that a chance remark from that Madame de Rocanère, and some office gossip could induce me to doubt my child, as to whom I have been imagining a mass of infamous things of which I did not dare seek proofs! Do you know how charming those Sélény ladies are?

ANTONIN (*vaguely*).

Indeed!

VAILLANT.

Mademoiselle Esther has just been here; she was sitting there — there — not five minutes ago; a little more and she would have breakfasted with us. Ah! old Bartholo, you old fool!

(*The bedroom door opens.*)

ANTONIN (*in an undertone*).

Be careful.

VAILLANT (*going to meet* LYDIE *and kissing her*).

Come! to table.

SCENE VIII.

THE SAME, LYDIE.

LYDIE (*who has taken off her apron and dried her eyes*).

Good-morning, Antonin. Do you breakfast with us?

ANTONIN.

No, thanks, I have breakfasted.

VAILLANT (*having taken his seat*).

Sit down all the same and take a cup of tea. It 's good for you. With all the abominations that you handle and inhale during the day —

LYDIE (*hurriedly to* ANTONIN).

Is everybody well at home?

ANTONIN.

Very well.

VAILLANT.

I dreamed of our visit to your laboratory and of that assortment of rat-poisons.

LYDIE (*to* ANTONIN, *very rapidly with the evident intention of interrupting her father*).

How is your mother? and your sisters?

ANTONIN.

All well. They are very happy, as you can imagine, thanks to godfather, who obtained a renewal of the old lease.

VAILLANT.

Thanks to the duchess, my children. Is n't it strange that I can't call her anything else? (*To Antonin.*) Did you see that she has returned to Paris and that the breach is patched up?

ANTONIN.

I saw it.

(*He glances furtively at* LYDIE, *who is busily serving the tea.*)

VAILLANT.

The newspapers are talking of a grand charity fête at the Padovani palace. They go everywhere together; the other day, at a stag-hunt at Brétigny's, they gave the duchess — what is it they call it? — oh! yes, the honors of the foot!

ANTONIN (*savagely, in an undertone*).

Her husband is the one who should have the honors of the foot.

(*He goes through the motion of kicking.*)

VAILLANT (*laughing as he eats*).

You still have a grudge against him, eh! — Never mind, he is somebody, this Paul Astier. Did you read his speech at the Chamber yesterday? He does n't mince matters, I tell you; although he 's the son of an academician, he goes straight to the point.

ANTONIN.

Yes, he 's one of our charming young *struggle-for-lifeurs*.

VAILLANT.

What 's that?

ANTONIN.

Struggle-for-lifeurs, that 's the name Herscher applies in his last book to this new breed of little savages, who make use of the excellent discovery of the struggle for life as an excuse for all sorts of villany.

VAILLANT.

It is the law of nature, however, as he told us the other day.

ANTONIN.

Yes, the law of the forests and caves; but we are not living in those days, thank God! Man stood erect a long while ago; he invented fire and light, conscience and moral life, and he made the wild beasts afraid.

VAILLANT.

Why don't you eat, child?

ANTONIN.

And now the wild beasts are taking their revenge. Don't you hear them growling and rending one another around the trough?

VAILLANT (*to* LYDIE).

The rascal — how he talks!

ANTONIN.

I certainly do not blame the great Darwin, but the hypocritical knaves who invoke his authority, who assume to transform a single observation, a scholar's single discovery, into an article of the Code, and to apply it systematically. Ah! you consider those fellows great

men, able men! But I tell you that they are nothing of the sort! (*He strikes the table, his spectacles fall off, he picks them up and wipes them.*) There can be no greatness without kindliness, compassion, human sympathy. I tell you that these theories of Darwin's are villanous in their application, because they seek out all that is brutish in a man's nature, and, as Herscher says, arouse all that still remains on four paws in the quadruped become biped.

VAILLANT (*with his mouth full*).

Why did n't you tell M. Paul Astier that, when we were at his house?

ANTONIN.

Ah! why did n't I? Because I am a poor, timid, stammering wretch; because words never come to me till too late, or else they come in waves, in masses, with an impetuosity that prevents them from leaving my throat. It is n't my fault; I saw things that were too terrible when I was too young. I was fifteen years old when they brought father home one night — you remember, godfather. For more than six months the muscles of my mouth trembled all the time. To-day I have ceased to tremble, but I still stammer, especially when I speak under the influence of any strong emotion.

VAILLANT (*deeply moved, turning to his daughter*).

Do you hear that, little one? The poor fellow has never been able to say what comes from his heart.

ANTONIN.

Oh, before that man, the other day, when he spoke of my beloved father so indifferently: "Poor M. Caussade

was n't cut out for business;" to think that I could not find a word to say — nothing but the dread of weeping and a mad longing to strike him in the face with my fist. Yes, I should have been capable of doing that.

VAILLANT.

In your view, then, Paul Astier —

ANTONIN (*putting on his spectacles*).

Paul Astier, with his tight-fitting coat and his curled moustache, Paul Astier, the statesman, Paul Astier, the man of the world, is of the same breed as the two rascals whose story is told in the powerful book which I will loan you.

(LYDIE *rises suddenly and goes out.*)

VAILLANT.

Where are you going, dearest? Call the maid.

LYDIE.

I am coming back, father.

SCENE IX.

ANTONIN, VAILLANT.

VAILLANT.

She is a little nervous to-day too; it seems to be in the air of the house, and you had better take advantage of it.

ANTONIN.

Take advantage of it?

VAILLANT.

To be sure. Since your explanation three months ago, you have never mentioned the subject again, have you?

ANTONIN.

Never. And I suppose that her intentions are still the same.

VAILLANT.

I don't think so. I watched her just now while you were talking. Try to find out. I am going to leave you alone; you are in an eloquent and bold vein. Try to convince her, and if she says yes, come to the office and tell me. I should be so overjoyed; I have been dreaming of your marrying her for such a long time! Above all things, don't stammer, deuce take it! — none of your "the — the — is n't it so?" And if you will take my advice — (*Putting down his cup and taking off* ANTONIN'S *spectacles.*) — You are much better-looking without your spectacles. (*Throwing down his napkin and calling in a loud voice.*) Lydie, my girl!

LYDIE (*entering with a covered dish*).

Here I am, father.

VAILLANT.

Sapristi! my child, just look at the clock! Our fair caller delayed us, and I must hurry off to my desk.

LYDIE.

Why, don't you want any of — ?

VAILLANT (*taking a handful of cherries*).

Just a few cherries, which I will nibble on the stairs, like an old *gamin.* Finish your breakfast, my love, you

have n't eaten anything. Antonin will keep you company. As it happens, he has something to say to you, something that I countersign with both hands.

(*He throws her a kiss, goes out humming, and closes the door behind him.*)

Love me, my love,
And I will love thee.

SCENE X.

ANTONIN, LYDIE.

(*They stand face to face.*)

ANTONIN (*smiling sadly*).

Don't be afraid, Lydie.

LYDIE.

I know that you have nothing to say to me, my friend; we had our explanation, once for all; but I have a favor to ask of you.

ANTONIN.

Tell me what it is.

LYDIE.

I am going away for a long journey — my father knows nothing of it. When he comes home to-night, he will find a letter here telling him where I have gone, and why.

ANTONIN.

Can you think of such a thing, Lydie? You are going away? Think of the grief of that poor man, whose whole life you are.

LYDIE.

Yes, yes, but I must. Don't try to move me. I have trouble enough, and I must do it. What I ask you to do is to be with him when he finds it out, and not leave him alone. Will you promise?

ANTONIN.

I promise.

LYDIE.

Thanks.

(*A pause.*)

ANTONIN (*without looking at her*).

Are you going far?

LYDIE.

Very far.

ANTONIN.

For a long time?

LYDIE.

Oh! very long.

ANTONIN.

And is he going with you?

LYDIE (*looking at him in amazement*).

He?

ANTONIN (*in an undertone*).

Yes, I understand — he will come and join you — Paul Astier!

LYDIE.

You know then — everybody knows, do they not?

ANTONIN.

You told me that you loved another man, and I looked about. Indeed, he hardly made a secret of it.

(*Violently.*) But do you mean that your departure is indispensable?

LYDIE.

Indispensable.

ANTONIN.

To-day?

LYDIE.

To-day.

ANTONIN.

At what time?

LYDIE.

In a moment.

ANTONIN (*looking around the room*).

Is your luggage ready?

LYDIE (*with a heart-rending smile*).

I have all that I need.

ANTONIN (*after a pause*).

Tell me, as you are going alone, don't you want me to send my mother to you? Would n't you like her to go with you? She understands everything. She has had so much unhappiness!

LYDIE (*with clenched teeth*).

No, no, thanks, I — don't need any one.

ANTONIN.

At least, let me go to the station with you.

LYDIE.

No, I beg you.

[illegible] (*[illegible]*).

I am your friend [illegible] the less.

[illegible]

[illegible] — and a generous heart. I ought — I would — but it is too late. I have passed my happiness by without seeing it. I was thinking of that, as I listened to you. (*A pause, then passionately.*) Ah! yes, you are right, that man is a villain. He appears to me now in his true light. How he has made use of me, how he has debased me and crushed me. And I love him still.

[illegible] (*deeply moved*).

Yes, that is the way it is when one loves — just the way. It is of no use to see and know and repeat things to yourself — the — the — is it so? — (*A sob.*) you keep on loving just the same.

[illegible] (*deeply moved*).

Adieu, my friend. I rely on you.

(*He makes a sign of assent, and rushes from the room.*)

ACT FOURTH.

FIRST TABLEAU.

PAUL ASTIER'S bedroom. — Dressing-room at the right, door wide open so that half of the interior is visible. — Time, evening; the lamps are lighted.

SCENE I.

CHEMINEAU, STENNE, *afterward* LORTIGUE.

(*Mute Action.*)

CHEMINEAU *in full dress and white cravat, stretched out on a divan, reading a newspaper by the light of a lamp.* STENNE, *the small servant, comes and goes noiselessly, lighting the gas, heating water, then glances at the little Louis XVI. clock on the mantel. He has his master's black coat and waistcoat on his arm, and carefully deposits them on the back of a chair.*

STENNE.

The master 's very late, Monsieur Chemineau.

CHEMINEAU (*looking at the clock*).

Yes, half-past seven. And yet there was no sitting of the Chamber to-day.

LORTIGUE (*entering hurriedly in evening dress, programme in hand*).

No one here?

STENNE.

No one.

LORTIGUE. (*He does not see* CHEMINEAU.)

Horrible! All the dinner guests are here, ministers and ministresses, the Academy, the embassies; nobody missing but the master of the house and (*mockingly*) our incomparable novelist.

CHEMINEAU (*still at full length*).

What novelist?

LORTIGUE.

Hallo! you here, you? — Why, Herscher! he's the key of the whole evening. He is to read fragments of his new book.

CHEMINEAU.

Two Young Frenchmen of To-day. The rascal! what a wag he is!

LORTIGUE.

To be sure. The modern idea — the acme of modernism. — We have illustrated programmes. (*Reading.*) "Grand charitable fête at hôtel Padovani, for the benefit of the Hospital for Deaf and Dumb Children."

CHEMINEAU (*from the divan*).

Let us see.

LORTIGUE.

A most ingenious idea of my own, this exhibition of the fashionable novelist, a man who goes nowhere. We have sold more than five hundred tickets at forty francs!

CHEMINEAU.

Forty francs to look at a novelist! — That's a trifle high.

LORTIGUE.

Oh! and to hear him. He's to read in the conservatory.

CHEMINEAU.

Do you attend the dinner?

LORTIGUE.

I? I attend everything, dinner and fête. — And you?

CHEMINEAU.

Nothing.

STENNE (*turning up the lamp*).

Because you are not from Nîmes.

(*Exit Stenne.*)

SCENE II.

LORTIGUE, CHEMINEAU.

LORTIGUE (*approaching the divan*).

I say, Maître Chemineau. — (*He laughs.*) — It's strange that I am always tempted to conjugate you like a Latin verb: *Chemino, je chemine, cheminas* —

CHEMINEAU (*phlegmatically*).

Cheminabo, je cheminerai.

LORTIGUE (*placing a small chair near the divan*).

You have the head of a man who will make his way (*cheminera*). (*Straddling the chair and lowering his*

voice.) — Come, you old schemer, tell me what 's going on here.

CHEMINEAU.

Here? How do you suppose I know? It is your place to tell me.

LORTIGUE.

They were ruined, they were going to sell everything, and they sell nothing. They were living apart, on the brink of divorce, and here they are in the midst of a honeymoon. What is the real meaning of it all? My curiosity is perfectly legitimate, please observe.

CHEMINEAU.

Of course.

LORTIGUE.

For, you see, if there is to be a break in the family, I want to be on the strongest side.

CHEMINEAU.

Bédam!

LORTIGUE.

Evidently the master is brewing a *coup*. But what is it?

CHEMINEAU.

What, indeed?

LORTIGUE (*speaking still lower*).

Between ourselves I consider that he 's very weak in this business.

CHEMINEAU.

Heu!

LORTIGUE (*mimicking him*).

Heu! — If I had been in his place I would have got rid of my incubus, in one way or another, a long while ago.

CHEMINEAU.

In one way or another?

LORTIGUE (*with a wicked leer.*)

Exactly. (*He rises and paces the floor.*) But the men of your generation, between thirty and forty, even the strongest of them, are hampered by a mass of superstitions and scruples.

(*He lights a cigarette.*)

CHEMINEAU.

How old are you, by the way, Lortigue?

LORTIGUE.

Twenty-three. As my master Astier says, I am in the "boat" that comes directly after yours, crowds you and pursues you.

CHEMINEAU.

No prejudices on your boat, eh?

LORTIGUE.

Freight? — we can't carry it.

CHEMINEAU.

Nothing at all?

LORTIGUE.

Not a thing.

CHEMINEAU.

And the gendarme?

LORTIGUE.

The gendarme! Yes, on a pinch, if you choose. although, in reality, the gendarme of to-day —

CHEMINEAU.

Ah! I 'm horribly afraid, even of him. If there were no gendarme —

LORTIGUE.

That 's what I was just saying — the superstitions of the people in your boat. Because you don't follow Berkeley with me!

CHEMINEAU.

Berkeley?

LORTIGUE.

The Scotch doctrine. — Nothing exists, the world is a phantasmagoria. Admit the principle and you can venture to do anything: it does n't make the slightest difference. That 's my theory; I will loan it to you, if you want it.

CHEMINEAU.

Thanks, it 's a fine theory! I don't say that if occasion offers —

SCENE III.

THE SAME, PAUL ASTIER, STENNE.

PAUL (*enters in a state of extreme agitation, followed by the little servant who takes his hat, overcoat, and cane*).

Is Chemineau here?

CHEMINEAU (*rising*).

Present. (*Folding his newspaper.*) On duty, as usual.

LORTIGUE (*hastily throwing away his cigarette*).

Hurry, my dear master, in heaven's name. Everybody is in the salon.

PAUL (*roughly*).

Just go and see if I 'm in the salon, will you!

LORTIGUE (*delighted*).

Excellent!

(*Exit* LORTIGUE *briskly.*)

PAUL (*to* STENNE).

Is everything ready?

STENNE.

Yes, M'sieur.

PAUL.

Go — I will dress alone.

STENNE (*at the door*).

Curling tongs?

PAUL.

Yes — no — perhaps. I will ring.

(*Exit* STENNE.)

SCENE IV.

PAUL ASTIER, CHEMINEAU.

PAUL (*in a frenzy, unbuttoning and taking off his coat*).

Did n't I tell you that love is a miserable business? Do you know, she has actually tried to poison herself!

(*He throws his coat on the bed.*)

CHEMINEAU.

Who? Your wife?

PAUL.

Oh! of course! (*He unbuttons his waistcoat.*) My wife, indeed! — Lydie, little Vaillant! (*He tears off his cravat and throws it down.*) A miracle! I was driving through Avenue Gabriel. I saw a light on the ground-floor.

CHEMINEAU.

Your bachelor's quarters?

PAUL.

I went in, my dear fellow, and among the flowers, in the brilliantly lighted room, with such a tremor as I have on days of important sessions, I found her on the point of despatching herself *ad patres*. "I have come to your house to die."

CHEMINEAU.

Charming!

PAUL.

Fancy me, in my position, with such a scandal on my hands! (*He takes off his waistcoat and throws it on the bed.*) Two minutes later and it was all up with her.

CHEMINEAU.

A pretty kettle of fish!

PAUL (*linen rumpled, sleeves rolled up over his muscular arms, tragic pose*).

She persisted, the hussy. I had to fight, to snatch death from between her teeth; and even so I am not sure that she 'll escape it. You see, she had drunk a good dose, and no opera-bouffe poison either. (*Feeling*

in his pocket and producing a small pink phial.) Strychnine, aconitine, I don't know what — the most powerful drug she could find in her Antonin's stock.

(*He puts the phial on the edge of a table at the right, goes into his dressing-room and pours out a glass of water.*)

CHEMINEAU.

Antonin? — Oh! yes — "the — the — is n't that so?" — the pill-driver.

PAUL (*turning round, while he washes his face*).

Precisely.

CHEMINEAU (*walking to the table and scrutinizing the phial, with his hands behind his back, as if he were afraid of being bitten*).

Upon my word, that potion has a serious look. — (*He puts his nose to it, sniffs, and turns away.*) A strange idea, all the same. One must love a man violently. — What luck you have! oh! what luck you have! And how did you get out of it?

PAUL (*returning, wiping his bare neck and arms*).

A genuine *tour de force.* In the first place, the doctor, drugs, tears. Then, in less than an hour I succeeded in consoling her and reconsoling her, in making it as clear as the day to her that I loved nobody but her in the world, and that there was nothing for her to do but to go home to her little father, like a good girl. And all the time this idea was running through my brain: "Twenty-five people to dinner at my house."

(*He goes back into the dressing room and throws aside his towel.*)

CHEMINEAU.

Sapristi! what a clever fellow you are! For my part, the thought of those twenty-five people would have taken away my appetite.

PAUL.

Unfortunately —

CHEMINEAU.

Unfortunately?

PAUL.

She had left a letter at home.

CHEMINEAU.

The devil!

PAUL.

Touching farewells to her father; and it 's to be feared that the old man, when he went home —

CHEMINEAU.

Did she mention your name?

PAUL.

No danger? She loves me too well.

(*He returns to the dressing-room.*)

CHEMINEAU.[1]

That 's what I call exciting! A man must live for two at such times. Ah! there 's no danger of anything of the sort happening to me in my omnibus-horse 's life — between the Palais de Justice and old

[1] Some of Chemineau's remarks on this and the following page are simply "padding," necessitated by the action of the play, to allow Paul time to don his fine linen and return in a white cravat. The text may be abridged if the actor who plays Paul does not loiter over his toilet.

Boutin's office. And then the women never take me seriously! I laugh and joke, and, as you say, passion never jokes. I have tried hard, *parbleu!* to follow your method, to play at sentiment, vibration of the heart-strings, with them. But I can't do it, there 's always a moment when I forget myself. Paris is the cause of it; you catch the laughing habit as soon as your 're born, in the air of the boulevard, and you can't get rid of it. Now with a foreigner, perhaps — for after all, women are n't all alike; it 's just the same with them as it is with fish, some bite at grain and some at cherries. What do you think about it, Paul? Do you think that with a foreigner this fashion of loving *à la Parisienne*, like a street-hawker, like a wag —?

PAUL (*in the dressing-room*).

Foreigners or not, women bite at nothing but romance.

CHEMINEAU.

What a shrewd rascal it is! I say!

PAUL.

Well?

CHEMINEAU.

Do you know that, if you should write your memoirs, they would be much more interesting than the great marshal's?

PAUL.

What marshal?

CHEMINEAU.

The Maréchal de Sélény, the glorious vanquished of Carinthia. Only, they would n't be very easy to illustrate. Little Vaillant for instance — (*He laughs.*) —

But what is she to say when she goes home, poor wretch? what story can she invent?

PAUL. (*reappearing in black trousers, white shirt-front, shirt of fine lawn, and buttoning his wrist bands*).

Ah! you see I put her in a carriage, — not very self-possessed, as you can imagine, — and drove with her to the corner of her street; then I said: "You are a woman, you know how to lie; get out of it somehow, my girl." And here I am.

CHEMINEAU (*drawing a long breath*).

Ouf!

PAUL.

Now let us talk about serious matters. Have you seen those ladies?

(*He lights a small spirit-lamp.*)

CHEMINEAU.

Breakfasted with them this morning, as I do every day. This evening I escort them to the gala performance at the Opera. We talked a great deal about you.

(*He walks to the back of the stage and sits down.*)

PAUL.

Naturally.

(*He heats his little curling-iron.*)

CHEMINEAU.

I keep the sacred fire alight, as you can imagine! — (*He returns toward the front.*) — But I will not conceal from you that Mademoiselle Esther is not very well pleased. She considers that it takes a long while, that it drags, drags.

PAUL (*curling his moustaches*).

Oh! my friend, it 's horrible; I am making no progress.

CHEMINEAU.

Impossible! Does Joséphine resist Napoléon?

PAUL.

She changes her ideas every day. She will, and then she won't. What spoils everything is that she has seen Esther; she thinks her too pretty.

CHEMINEAU.

She will and then she won't; that 's your secretary's fault, who is playing false with you, as always. How can you keep that Lortigue about you?

PAUL (*gravely*).

I keep him — (*He blows out his little lamp.*) — I keep him because nothing is so rare as a determined man, and nothing more valuable, on occasion.

(*He buttons his collar.*)

CHEMINEAU.

As to being determined, he is that. If all those in his boat resemble him, we shall see some fine sights. A boat in which there is nothing, neither the good Lord nor the gendarme! Now we older men, without absolutely believing in the old institutions, know that they are there. It 's like a stair-rail; you don't often use it, but it gives you a sense of security; whereas these little *fin de siècle* fellows — Meanwhile, my good friend, you are making a fool of yourself. To please your wife you

have postponed the sale of Mousseaux. Very good! I put your creditors off, and put them off again; but you will have to pay. Then, too, you allow her to squander your last sous. The waiver of the Caussade rent, these parties, these receptions —

PAUL (*grinding his teeth as he ties his cravat*).

Yes, everything to please her! I don't know whether I shall succeed, but I know very well that I have a savage longing to —

(*He makes a fierce gesture.*)

CHEMINEAU (*smiling*).

To get rid of her.

PAUL (*striking the table*).

To think that I have, under my hand, a unique opportunity —

CHEMINEAU (*horrified*).

Under your hand?

(*He glances at the little pink phial and rises hurriedly.*)

PAUL (*putting on his waistcoat*).

To be sure.

CHEMINEAU (*aside*).

Poison?

PAUL.

— Esther de Sélény.

CHEMINEAU.

Oh! yes, Esther de Sélény. — You frightened me.

PAUL.

How?

CHEMINEAU.

Nothing, nothing.—Yes, of course, it 's a magnificent opportunity. But be on your guard; you have rivals on the scent, and no contemptible ones either.

PAUL.

Who, for instance ?

CHEMINEAU.

Count Adriani.

PAUL.

Pepino ! Nonsense ! We will give him Aunt Kate.

CHEMINEAU (*hastily*).

Oh ! no. Aunt Kate is for me; I have engaged her.

PAUL.

What?

CHEMINEAU.

Oh ! I shall succeed, I promise you; and, contrariwise to your theory that women don't like laughter, laughter is just what I caught her with — on account of her deep mourning, I suppose.

PAUL (*with a forced laugh*).

Well, well ! Please observe this Chemineau !

CHEMINEAU (*modestly*).

Chemino, je chemine, cheminabo.

PAUL.

You are always telling me how clever I am, but it seems to me that —

CHEMINEAU (*helping him to put on his coat*).

Dame! my dear fellow, the struggle for life. I am struggling too, — for old Boutin's office. Besides, it does n't interfere with your plans; Esther's fortune remains intact, and is n't it better to have me for your uncle and right in the family? I will help you in. Believe me, the young *garde-noble* is a more dangerous rival than you imagine. You have n't seen him yet in uniform, have you? — very pretty he is! And then he 's always on hand, never lets go. He is to join us at the Opera this evening.

PAUL.

But he dines here.

(*Feeling in the pockets of his business coat.*)

CHEMINEAU.

He 'll go away early, you 'll see.

PAUL.

I defy him to do it. I will give him a lesson in manners.

CHEMINEAU.

At all events, you are warned; try to move fast, there is none too much time.

PAUL (*wrathfully*).

Oh! I know that well enough.

CHEMINEAU.

You are all ready now, so I will go.

PAUL.

Wait. A word on my card for Esther.

CHEMINEAU (*watching him while he writes, in full dress, standing, with his foot on a chair*).

On my word, you are much better this way — you did n't look right just now in your shirt-sleeves; it 's amazing how clothes make a gentlemen of you! — a white cravat is almost equivalent to good morals. — (*As he is about to go.*) — I say, Paul.

PAUL.

Well?

CHEMINEAU (*pointing to the phial*).

Don't leave that lying around.

PAUL.

What?

CHEMINEAU (*with the same furtive gesture*).

See you to-morrow.

(*Exit* CHEMINEAU.)

PAUL (*alone, fully dressed, standing by the small table*).

Ah! yes, that — (*Surprised, as if he could not believe his eyes.*) — Why is that thing here? How did it come here? I did nothing to obtain it; such mixtures are too dangerous in one's own house! — (*Reflecting.*) — It must be that that little girl — What a strange coinci-

dence! —(*Taking up the phial.*) — Something quick and sure, that leaves no trace.— (*In an undertone, almost whispering.*) — A few drops in a glass of water, and I could be free! —(*Violently.*) — No! no! Never! never! never!

(*He raises his hand as if to throw the phial down, and checks himself as he hears his wife's voice.*)

SCENE V.

THE SAME, MARIA-ANTONIA.

MARIA-ANTONIA. (*She has come in a moment before and has been watching and listening; in full dress, décolletée, with powder on her hair.*)

Well, Paul, what is it?

PAUL (*starting suddenly, but instantly adopting a frank, courteous tone*).

Here I am, my love. — (*He has closed his hand on the phial, which he slips into the pocket of his waistcoat; then walks to meet his wife and offers her his arm.*) — Oho! so you use powder now, do you?

MARIA-ANTONIA (*speaking slowly in a deep voice, with her eyes fixed upon him.*)

So that the transition may be less abrupt, when the world sees me with the hair that goes with my years.

(*She takes his arm. Exeunt.*)

SECOND TABLEAU.

Smoking-room in Hôtel Padovani. — Time, evening, after the dinner; through the long windows at the rear, the guests invited for the evening can be seen going to the roofed garden where the reading is to take place.

SCENE I.

LORTIGUE, PAUL ASTIER, DUC DE BRETIGNY, COUNT ADRIANI (*in a superb red and gold costume*), *and some others of the dinner guests, finishing their coffee and smoking. Cigars and liqueurs on a table and buffet.*

LORTIGUE (*at the left of the stage, in front, sipping a petit verre and smoking a cigar, and looking at* PAUL ASTIER).

The master certainly has something on his mind this evening! I never saw him so absorbed. He did n't say three words during dinner — a man usually so self-possessed! *Bigre de bigre!* Can it be that the government is going to smash! — (*Ingenuously.*) — So soon!

SCENE II.

COUNTESS OF FODER, *afterward* MARIA-ANTONIA *and the* MARQUISE DE ROCANÈRE.

COUNTESS OF FODER (*foreign accent*).

Monsieur Lortigue!

LORTIGUE.

Madame?

COUNTESS OF FODER.

Where is our dear master, pray? I don't see him.

LORTIGUE.

What master?

COUNTESS OF FODER.

The master of all masters!

LORTIGUE.

Are you looking for the illustrious novelist?

COUNTESS OF FODER.

Yes, I would like to be presented; I was too far from him at the table.

LORTIGUE.

Why, Monsieur Herscher has gone into the conservatory. He is getting ready for his reading.

COUNTESS OF FODER.

Oh! do put my chair very near him, so that I can see him well. I am wild over that man.

LORTIGUE.

Listen, I will present you to him, but on one condition.

(*He says something to her earnestly, in an undertone. — She walks toward the back of the stage.*)

PAUL (*comes forward and sits down at the right of the table*).

Lortigue.

LORTIGUE (*hastening to his side*).

Monsieur?

PAUL (*very nervously*).

Did you dine well? Was the chicken good?

LORTIGUE (*surprised*).

Why, as usual, monsieur; I thought that everything was excellent!

PAUL.

So much the better! As it is the last meal you will eat in the house, I am not sorry that you will go away content.

LORTIGUE (*with a sickly smile*).

Ah! you — so I am dismissed?

PAUL.

You must have expected it. Let us see: in this last year, since I have been watching your manœuvres — (*He rises.*) — You are a fool, Monsieur Lortigue.— Mine was the solid side; you should have cast in your lot with me. I would have made your fortune with my own. You did n't understand it that way — so much the worse for you!

LORTIGUE.

But —

PAUL.

Enough, enough! We will settle this little account of ours directly.

(*He walks away.*)

LORTIGUE (*aside*).

Ah! we will settle it! It seems that it is n't settled, then. He holds me fast and he is going to put on the

screws. He is going to ask me some serious questions. Toupet de Nîmes, attention!

(*He is about to walk away, but* COUNT ADRIANI *stops him.*)

COUNT ADRIANI (*pointing to* MADAME FODER, *who is talking with* MARIA-ANTONIA *and* MADAME DE ROCANÈRE *at the back of the stage*).

Monsieur le Secrétaire, I beg your pardon. Who is that little woman who was talking to you a moment ago? She was opposite me at dinner.

LORTIGUE.

The Countess of Foder, a foreigner, for famous men.

COUNT ADRIANI.

For famous men — exclusively?

LORTIGUE.

Alas! no hope there, monsieur le comte; we owe her presence solely to M. Herscher.

COUNT ADRIANI.

I do not understand how all the women can be so infatuated over that gentleman. He is not handsome, he has no costume. In my country a man like that is nobody at all.

DUC DE BRÉTIGNY (*joining them*).

Ah! monsieur, it does me good to hear you talk like that. — Your hand — again. — (*Surprise of* COUNT ADRIANI.) — I am the Duc de Brétigny, of the Académie Française, author of —

COUNT ADRIANI.

Yes, yes, *simpatico, molto simpatico.*

THE DUKE (*posing for an harangue*).

When I think that, in this salon, which was for twenty years the leading academic salon of Paris, I have heard the illustrious Astier-Réhu — (*To Paul, still absorbed in thought.*) your father, my dear Paul — read his *Essay on Marcus Aurelius* for the benefit of this same orphanage!

LORTIGUE (*aside*).

Not likely to bring in much money, the *Essay on Marcus Aurelius!*

THE DUKE.

And that this evening Monsieur Herscher, the author of that shocking book, in which two young scoundrels murder a dairy-woman —

PAUL (*absently*).

What would you have, my dear duke; Maria-Antonia insisted on it.

THE DUKE.

Really, I can hardly recognize my perfect friend.— Consider that I was at her service, that she might have asked me for a fragment of my *Silversmiths in the Twelfth Century.*

(*They walk toward the back.*)

LORTIGUE (*following them*).

Not much money in that either!

COUNTESS OF FODER (*coming forward with* MADAME DE ROCANÈRE).

The thing that impresses me above all else in this masterpiece, my dear, is the scene on Rue Mazarine, the rupture between that young villain and the woman he loved, that farewell kiss on the sidewalk, in the rain, when they were denied the key to their hovel.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Oh! I read the book all night long; it was as delightful as a prick of morphine. To think that all that really happened! It 's much more entertaining than a novel.

COUNTESS OF FODER.

How I would like to pass a night in that garret!

LORTIGUE (*in a coldly ironical tone*).

Ah! that 's quite an idea! Perhaps we might be able to arrange it.

(*He continues to talk in a low tone with* MADAME FODER, *who turns her head away.*)

DUC DE BRÉTIGNY.

On my word, they are all mad!

MARIA-ANTONIA (*joining the group and sitting down at the right of the table*).

For my part, I have one fault to find with Monsieur Herscher. He has forgotten to mention the mothers. For, after all, those miserable creatures whose sad story he tells must have been children once. They had their cradles, they had mothers who leaned over to watch them in their sleep and said to themselves: "What will he be when he grows up?" And they fancied them

rich, loved, honored. They dreamed of everything for them except the ghastly thing that was to be. — (*Glancing at* PAUL, *who is still absorbed.*) — Ah! think of Cain's poor mother!

DUC DE BRÉTIGNY.

You forget, my dear friend, that a great poet has already sung superbly of that wretched mother. It was a consecrated theme, and this gentleman had no right to touch it.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Victor Hugo, true, I remember. (*Declaiming.*)

"Then wept they both, the forbears of the human race,
The father for Abel and for Cain the mother!"

LORTIGUE (*returning after a brief absence*).

Madame, everybody is there. M. Herscher asks if he may begin.

MARIA-ANTONIA (*to* BRÉTIGNY).

Your arm, my dear duke.

(*She takes* BRÉTIGNY'S *arm and goes off at the left, followed by the other guests.*)

COUNT ADRIANI (*moving away from* MADAME DE ROCANÈRE, *who has taken his arm*).

Excuse me, marchioness, but I cannot be present at the reading. I have an engagement at the Opera.

(*He steals away at the right, while* MADAME DE ROCANÈRE *goes off at the left, on the arm of another guest.*)

COUNTESS OF FODER (*to* LORTIGUE, *taking his arm*).

You must give me a good seat, you know, very near him.

PAUL (*to* LORTIGUE).

Escort Madame to her chair and return here and talk with me.

(*Exeunt* LORTIGUE *and the* COUNTESS *at the left.* PAUL ASTIER *hurries through the door at the right after* COUNT ADRIANI, *whose movements he has watched. Stage is empty. Applause in the distance.*)

SCENE III.

PAUL ASTIER, COUNT ADRIANI.

PAUL (*returning with the garde-noble, whom he pushes before him*).

Why no, no, my dear Pepino, that is not possible.

COUNT ADRIANI (*trying to escape*).

But, my friend, I tell you I have an engagement this evening at the gala performance at the Opera, for my little *combinazione.*

PAUL.

Indeed; and what about our great novelist? You surely would not offer him such an affront?

COUNT ADRIANI.

Oh! for my part, you know — novelists and novels —

PAUL.

True, you prefer *combinaziones.*

COUNT ADRIANI (*laughing*).

Yes, yes.

PAUL.

So Mademoiselle Esther expects you at the Opera, does she?

COUNT ADRIANI.

We agreed to meet there.

PAUL.

And you expect to bring off the affair, thanks to your uniform?

COUNT ADRIANI (*laughing*).

Just so! — Don't say a word.

PAUL (*nervously twisting his moustache*).

She is pretty, is n't she?

COUNT ADRIANI (*eyes like saucers*).

Cristo! how lovely she is!

PAUL.

And *simpatica* above all.

COUNT ADRIANI.

Yes, yes, *simpatica!* I was thinking so at that moment.

PAUL.

I said it to save you the trouble. — (*Suddenly becoming very serious.*) — Now listen to me. You have seen my pistol targets at Gastine's, have n't you?

COUNT ADRIANI.

Yes.

PAUL.

And you have seen me practise, on the fencing-floor, point and counter-point?

COUNT ADRIANI.

Cristo!

PAUL.

You know that I have fought ten duels — all with very fortunate results — for me! This being stated and fully understood, I forbid you to pay court to Mademoiselle de Sélény.

COUNT ADRIANI.

But —

PAUL.

I forbid you to join her this evening at the Opera.

COUNT ADRIANI.

But — I —

PAUL.

And I beg you to lose no time in taking the seat of honor reserved for you in our salons.

COUNT ADRIANI.

But — I —

PAUL.

For to refuse would be to insult me, and within the twenty-four hours —

COUNT ADRIANI.

Dio santo!

PAUL.

You would have to give me satisfaction.

COUNT ADRIANI.

My excellent friend — nevertheless —

PAUL.

Come, go in — quickly!

COUNT ADRIANI.

Faith, my dear Paolo, if I were not in uniform, I would yield to your strong arguments, — especially as this novelist is an altogether charming man and I naturally dislike battles. — But I am in full dress, and for the honor of the coat I wear —

(*He starts toward the door at the back.*)

PAUL (*in a terrible voice*).

So you are determined to go?

COUNT ADRIANI.

Oh!

PAUL.

Beware, Pepino! I 'll bleed you like a chicken!

COUNT ADRIANI (*mildly*).

Alas! poor me! I know it only too well. — (*Smiling.*) — But, you understand — (*Putting on his cap with a resolute gesture.*) — the uniform!

(*Exit.*)

SCENE IV.

PAUL (*alone*).

Not a bad fellow — only too many nerves, too impressionable. — He had n't a drop of blood left in his veins. He 'll be no paler day after to-morrow, when I have put three inches of cold steel into him. He 's not the man to stand in my way. — (*An angry gesture.*) — Ah! if only the rest were as easy!

SCENE V.

PAUL ASTIER, LORTIGUE.

(LORTIGUE *enters at the door at the left and comes forward to the table.*)

PAUL (*with a start*).

Ah! it's you. (*A pause. He looks him in the eye, opens his mouth to speak to him, then checks himself.*) — No — I have nothing to say — go back!

LORTIGUE (*smiling and glancing at the two doors*).

Am I to go back, or to go away? You forget that I am dismissed.

PAUL.

Go back! later we will see.

(*Exit* LORTIGUE *by the same door by which he entered.*)

SCENE VI.

PAUL ASTIER (*alone*), *afterward* MARIA-ANTONIA.

PAUL (*in a low voice*).

What was I about to do? Confide this thing, which I dare not confess to myself, to — Am I asleep? Am I going mad? — Paul Astier! Paul Astier! — (*Mumbling his words.*) — Agony! torture! it draws me on, and I dare not — I shall never dare.

MARIA-ANTONIA (*entering at the left, pale and tottering, speaking to some one outside*).

No, I beg you, leave me, leave me — it is nothing.
(*She falls into a low chair near the table, pretending not to see* PAUL.)

PAUL (*approaching her*).

What is the matter?

MARIA-ANTONIA (*feigning surprise*).

What, are you here too? We are courteous hosts.

PAUL.

Is one a host when his house is thrown open to such a rabble, and seats are sold at two louis? — Are you ill?

MARIA-ANTONIA (*fanning herself*).

Oh! a trifle, an ill turn — that reading — the emotion of those horrible, vivid scenes — the story of the crime, the execution of those two young thieves. Open the window, will you?

PAUL (*walking to the window*).

What an idea —

(*He opens the window.*)

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Ah! how good that feels!

(*She fans herself vigorously.*)

PAUL (*returning*).

What an idea to have such horrible things read in your house!

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Horrible things? What do you know about it? You have n't read the book, and (*smiling*) you evidently are not listening.

PAUL.

Not I! I don't like that sort of ladies' literature. — (*Between his teeth.*) — A story about murderers!

MARIA-ANTONIA.

I know your literary tastes; you are like all men of action. You prefer Madame de Genlis: the *Veillées du Château*, for instance.

PAUL.

This fellow's book is for the galleys rather than the château.

MARIA-ANTONIA.

You are hard to please, my friend. Ring, please, and have them bring me a glass of water. — (*A pause.*) — Well?

PAUL (*motionless, as if horrified*).

I beg your pardon?

MARIA-ANTONIA.

A glass of iced water. That will make me all right. Ring; the bell is at your hand.

PAUL.

No, I will go.

(*Exit hurriedly at the right. A pause.*)

MARIA-ANTONIA (*leaning across the table and watching him through the open door. Aside, in a heart-broken voice*).

Oh! Cain's poor mother! — (*Aloud, with an affable smile to* PAUL, *who returns bringing the glass of water.*)

You wait upon me yourself; that is very nice of you. — (*Pointing to the table.*) — Put it there — why, you are trembling, my dear; how pale you are! That window perhaps?

(*She moves as if to rise.*)

PAUL (*in an undertone*).

No, thanks.

MARIA-ANTONIA (*still seated*).

So this book of Herscher's does n't interest you? — (*Applause in the distance.*) — However, there are some passages in it, like the chapter of the plot, that taking possession of the man by the crime — One feels that it must be true. Don't you think so? — (*She takes the glass.* PAUL *turns his head away. She starts to drink, then stops.*) I suppose you are like Brétigny, who claims that such things are seen only in the slums, and that society, the true society, our society, is out of reach of such monstrosities! For my part, I am not of his opinion. We have had some superb crimes in the *beau monde.*

(*She puts the glass to her lips.*)

PAUL (*hastily*).

Maria!

MARIA-ANTONIA.

My dear.

(*She looks at him, waits for him to speak, and again puts the glass to her lips.*)

PAUL.

Don't drink!

(*He tries to take the glass,* MARIA-ANTONIA *gently pushes his hand away.*)

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Why? I am thirsty.

PAUL.

Throw it away — I insist — I beg you — throw it away!

MARIA-ANTONIA (*who has risen abruptly, still keeping her hand on the glass, which she places on the table*).

So you have n't the courage to go on to the end? So you are not a strong man, after all? Yet it was very well planned. It happens every day that a person of middle age dies suddenly in the midst of some social function. The very audacity of your crime would shield you. And you stop just on the brink. Such a little thing disturbs you, you tremble, you are all upset. You ought to have sent Lortigue to me. His hand would n't have trembled!

PAUL (*in a low tone, stammering*).

But I don't understand — I was afraid that iced water — would make you ill — and —

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Wretch! I was watching you! And I have been watching you for a long time. I knew that you would come to it, indeed I thought it would be sooner. — Oh! you struggled hard. I saw it all. Fear, a remnant of decency, that starched shirt-front on your breast, which takes the place of honor with such as you. But at last, you could n't resist, because you are a villain, because you have no pity, and because the temptation was too great and you had the vertigo. Tell me that there is no such thing as the vertigo of crime! You had it in

your eyes, a little while ago, before your mirror. Even before I saw you slip the phial into your pocket, I divined it. I said to myself, "He will do it to-day."

PAUL.

What madness! enough of this. Throw away that water and let us join our guests.

MARIA-ANTONIA (*moving the glass as he tries to take it, and standing between him and the table*).

Really! — And suppose I should call, Monsieur le Sous-Secrétaire d'État; suppose I should throw yonder doors wide open and cry: "Come and look, this is the man!"

(*She has raised her voice while speaking.*)

PAUL (*terrified*).

Maria!

MARIA-ANTONIA (*lowering her voice*).

"I rescued him from poverty and the gutter, I made him what he is, all that he has comes from me. I sacrificed my name and my fortune to him, I paid all his debts. — This gentleman's rehabilitation has cost me more than Mousseaux! And now that I have nothing left, that he has taken everything from me, this is what he gives me to drink, to thank me for what I have done, as a reward for my love and my attentions — death! — death to me, who have given him more than my life!"

PAUL (*savagely, folding his arms*).

Well, do as you say! call! Do you imagine that I am afraid? (*In a low tone, with his face very near hers.*) But understand, wretched woman, that it is

your fault that I have come to this. Why have you been so determined to thwart me? Why stand in my way? I must either blow out my brains or crush you. I have missed my aim, so much the worse for me! Come, call! Why don't you call? What hinders you?

MARIA-ANTONIA.

Yes, yes, you are strong, you are brave, you are sure that I will say nothing. And you are not mistaken; see! — (*She steps to the window and throws the glass out. Returning to him.*) — You wish for a divorce, it is all ready for you. My letter is written, despatched; I am the one who seeks a divorce. Now there is no longer a wife here, or a sweetheart; only a mother, a heart-broken, gray-haired mother, ready for any falsehood, any shame, to spare you the last shame of all — to prevent you from being a murderer.

(*She hides her face in her hands.*)

PAUL (*taking her hand with an abrupt gesture, puts his lips to it, hanging his head like a beaten cur. — In a very low tone*).

Forgive — forgive —

MARIA-ANTONIA (*turning away to conceal her tears*).

Oh! as for me, I can still forgive, but it is life that does not forgive. Oh! be a good man, a good man, an honest man! Poor child, you do not know that everything must be paid for — everything must be paid for — everything!

ACT FIFTH.

THE orangery at Mousseaux. — At the right and left, lines of orange and lemon trees; door at the left; at the back a vast gravelled courtyard, at the end of which rises one of the wings of the château. — In a corner at the left a harpsichord, an antique viol, hangings, a whole heap of articles already sold. — In the centre of the orangery, on the ground, a huge basket filled with books. — Weapons on a chair. — Disorder and confusion characteristic of a sale at auction. — At the back, a table surrounded by chairs. — One o'clock in the afternoon. — A bright September day.

SCENE I.

HEURTEBIZE, GARDENERS.

HEURTEBIZE (*full of animation*).

The table at the door for the notary! — Good! — (*Looking off at the right.*) Chairs for the ladies. Good! Bring me that basket. — Put a few more chairs over here. — We had too few yesterday. — This sale attracts such a crowd!

SCENE II.

THE SAME, VAILLANT.

(VAILLANT *enters at the back; features much changed, worn and wrinkled, a crêpe band on his hat.*)

HEURTEBIZE (*arranging the chairs*).

Ah! Monsieur Vaillant. In the old neighborhood once more? It's a long time since we saw you.

VAILLANT (*coming forward*).

Yes, yes, Père Heurtebize — (*To the gardeners who salute him.*) — Good-day, good-day. — (*To* HEURTEBIZE, *still busily occupied.*) I saw that your sale was to take place, so I came to pass a day here and try to get hold of some souvenir, some relic of this dear house where my child was so happy.

HEURTEBIZE (*still arranging his chairs*).

Oh! you come late, Monsieur Vaillant. This is the fifth day. To-day we finish up the weapons, hunting implements — then we sell the stables, and perhaps the orange-trees, if there is time. — (*Enter a number of men at the back.*) — Ah! here are the dealers from Paris, the band of vultures. — (*Shouting to the dealers, who are trying the harpsichord.*) — Ho! there, don't touch anything, everything in that corner is sold.

VAILLANT.

And is the château sold?

HEURTEBIZE.

Yes, the château is sold; the new owners are already installed, camping out, as it were, in the Medici pavilion. — (*Lowering his voice.*) Two foreign women, very rich — but they won't be as good as our poor madame.

VAILLANT.

Oh! yes, poor madame!

HEURTEBIZE.

That marriage was her undoing. However, it's all over, she is divorced.

VAILLANT.

And has gone back to Ajaccio. We see some strange things in these days. — Do you remain, Heurtebize?

HEURTEBIZE (*watching the people arriving at the back of the stage*).

I hope so; Monsieur Chemineau told me they would keep me.

VAILLANT.

Chemineau? The solicitor who —

HEURTEBIZE.

Yes, he has charge of the liquidation of the affairs of the household; and I don't know how it happens, but he is on the best of terms with the new owners. — (*Shouting.*) — Not there, those chairs are reserved. (*He darts off to the right, toward* MESDAMES DE ROCANÈRE *and* FODER, *who are accompanied by* COUNT ADRIANI. *He makes a courtesy as he recognizes the marchioness.*) — This way, Madame de Rocanère, if you please.

SCENE III.

THE SAME, COUNTESS OF FODER, MADAME DE ROCANÈRE, *on whose arm is* COUNT ADRIANI, *walking very slowly with a cane. Behind this group, enters the notary and takes his place at his table with his clerk; then groups of people who have come to the sale.*

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

(*While* MADAME FODER *talks with the notary, she crosses the stage, leading the garde-noble slowly.*)

How do you feel, dear count?

COUNT ADRIANI.

My head whirls a little. But I am very well, I am very well.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Did not I tell you that the air of Rocanère would complete your cure?

COUNT ADRIANI (*ingratiatingly*).

And your kind attentions, marchioness. And the excellent marquis's old Tokay.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE (*tenderly*).

Strangely enough, while taking care of you I have cured myself. I no longer take pricks of morphine.

COUNT ADRIANI (*sitting down with difficulty, at the left, with a chair for his feet*).

That monster of a Paul Astier gave me a prick! Five months on my back, *peverino!*— (*With a languishing glance.*) — And you were not there, Louise.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Hush!

COUNTESS OF FODER (*approaching them*).

Well, the notary has told me the names of the new châtelaines of Mousseaux — Mesdames de Sélény.

COUNT ADRIANI (*with a start*).

Oho!

COUNTESS OF FODER.

Two Hungarians — one very pretty.

COUNT ADRIANI.

Cristo! how love —

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE (*severely*).

Do you know her, Pepino?

COUNT ADRIANI (*looking down, with a hypocritical air*).

A little.

COUNTESS OF FODER.

But that is n't all, so they say. It seems that Paul Astier, as soon as the time required by law has elapsed, is to marry the damsel.

COUNT ADRIANI.

Ah! that was my own *combinazione!* And he has worked it out. (*Rising.*) Let us see what this notary has to say.

COUNTESS OF FODER.

Well! what has happened to him?

(*She and the* MARCHIONESS *follow him toward the back of the stage.*)

HEURTEBIZE (*wiping his forehead, returning to* VAILLANT, *who is sitting on a bank, lost in thought, with his eyes on the ground*).

How is everything with you, Monsieur Vaillant? Satisfactory? Still in the collector's office?

VAILLANT.

No. I resigned after my daughter's death.

HEURTEBIZE.

Great God! Your daughter, that sweet girl? — And I did n't notice all this black on you. I ask your pardon with all my heart. But how did it happen?

VAILLANT.

Does one ever know? The air of Paris did n't agree with her. She came home one evening, sick. She dragged along for two months — and then — and then — (*Rising, aside.*) — Oh! to know the villain who killed her!

HEURTEBIZE.

Dear Mademoiselle Lydie, so kind-hearted and gentle; we adored her at the house. I remember when she left the château, the day of her terrible scene with madame. — (VAILLANT *starts.*) — She came to our house all of a tremble.

VAILLANT (*stupefied*).

A scene with madame! with the duchess?

HEURTEBIZE (*in a lower tone*).

Why, yes, you know — When madame caught them together.

VAILLANT (*furiously*).

Together?

HEURTEBIZE.

Why, caught her with her husband!

THE NOTARY.

Heurtebize!

HEURTEBIZE (*hastily*).

Here, monsieur le notaire.

(*He goes back toward the notary's table.*)

VAILLANT (*stifling a cry*).

Paul Astier! — It was he! — (*Alone at the front of the stage.*) — Oh! now everything becomes clear. My ap-

pointment at Paris; the duchess's greeting the last time I came here. She must have believed that I was an accomplice in their infamies. Ah! yes, yes, that was the name my child concealed from me to the last, the name on which her teeth shut tight in the death-agony. — Paul Astier! — We will see, we will see. — (*He looks at his watch.*) — Five hours to return to Paris. May I lose my name of Vaillant if my daughter is not avenged to-night!

HEURTEBIZE (*returning*).

Monsieur Vaillant, what do you suppose I just learned? He is here.

VAILLANT.

Paul Astier? — Why has he come here?

HEURTEBIZE.

Dame! He no longer owns the château, but he is still Deputy for the arrondissement, and as election time is approaching —

VAILLANT (*almost smiling, but with a terrible expression*).

Ah! he is here! — Where does he lodge?

HEURTEBIZE.

Why, at the Lion d'Argent. There 's no other inn hereabout.

VAILLANT.

Thanks, I will go there.

(*Exit at the left.*)

HEURTEBIZE (*looking toward the back*).

Attention! — the mistresses. — (*He stands aside.*)

SCENE VI.

THE SAME, THE MARÉCHALE, ESTHER, CHEMINEAU, A FOOTMAN.

(*Gorgeous summer dresses, brilliant sun-umbrellas. The* MARÉCHALE *in pink on* CHEMINEAU'S *arm.* ESTHER *stops at the entrance to the stage and talks with the notary, who rises to salute her. At the left* MESDAMES FODER *and* DE ROCANÈRE *look on with interest, especially in* ESTHER'S *direction. The tall footman precedes the ladies, carrying a cushion for the* MARÉCHALE'S *feet.*)

THE MARÉCHALE (*to* CHEMINEAU, *in a languishing, whining tone*).

Ah! my friend, what a sacrifice I am making to you! You are tearing my poor great man from my heart, bit by bit.

CHEMINEAU (*blooming*).

If it won't grieve you too much, tell me how.

THE MARÉCHALE.

First, his hat disappears from the reception-room.

CHEMINEAU (*laughing*).

I constantly mistook it for mine.

THE MARÉCHALE.

Then, a cover is no longer laid for him.

CHEMINEAU (*playfully*).

He never came in time.

THE MARÉCHALE.

And now I have laid aside my widow's-weeds, which I had sworn to wear forever.

CHEMINEAU.

Well, confess that you feel much lighter. Pink is so becoming to you; and then, you know, we are going to be married.

THE MARÉCHALE.

Ah! hush, Ferdinand!

CHEMINEAU (*aside*).

My name really is Ferdinand, I believe. (*Aloud.*) I could not marry you as the widow Artemisia.

THE MARÉCHALE.

Never mind! you will let me put it on again now and then, won't you?

CHEMINEAU.

Mourning?

THE MARÉCHALE.

On certain commemorative dates; for instance, the anniversary of Carinthia, his glorious defeat.

CHEMINEAU (*gayly*).

Bless my soul! why, I will wear mourning myself on those days. What do I care? In the first place, for a solicitor, black is the proper color.

THE MARÉCHALE.

And the *Memoirs* — my hero's *Memoirs!* You will allow me to give some time to them?

CHEMINEAU.

We will both attend to them. Your hero is my hero too, to some extent. The *Memoirs* of a great man are very good to have around. I will do as I am doing here, — I will look after the sale.

(*He places her on one of the chairs at the right and arranges under her feet the cushion carried by the servant.*)

ESTHER (*coming toward the front of the stage, laughing*).

Ha! ha! it's very amusing.

CHEMINEAU.

What?

ESTHER (*pointing to* COUNT ADRIANI, *in front of whom* MADAME DE ROCANÈRE *is sitting, persistently holding her umbrella so that he cannot see* ESTHER).

Count Adriani is over there. They are hiding him; I suppose they have forbidden him to come and speak to us.

CHEMINEAU.

I should say so. He knows what it cost him to come and speak to you the last time — at the Opera.

ESTHER.

Yes, that is true. (*Calling* HEURTEBIZE *who is talking at the back of the stage.*) I say, What's-your-name! — (*She calls again.*) — What's-your-name!

HEURTEBIZE (*approaching her and uncovering*).

My name is Heurtebize, mademoiselle.

ESTHER (*very haughtily*).

Your name will be what I choose to call you, or else you will have no name at all. — Go and bring me the Mousseaux register, the book in which visitors write their names.

(HEURTEBIZE *bows and exit.*)

THE MARÉCHALE (*anxiously*).

What do you want of that register, my child?

ESTHER.

Nothing — a whim of mine.

(PAUL ASTIER *appears at the back. General movement of interest and curiosity. At this moment the Orangery is crowded with people of all sorts.*)

SCENE V.

THE SAME, PAUL ASTIER.

(*He is a little pale, very stylishly dressed, head erect. He bows to right and left and says a word to the notary at his table, as he passes.*)

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Oh! this is too much!

COUNTESS OF FODER.

What, pray?

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Paul Astier, here! He has the assurance!

COUNTESS OF FODER.

The handsome Ahasuerus pays a visit to Esther.

PAUL (*stopping in front of them*).

Ah! you here, mesdames? What a pleasant surprise!

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

The surprise is on our side, my dear Monsieur Astier.

PAUL (*perceiving* ADRIANI).

Ah! my dear count, delighted to see you on your feet again.

COUNT ADRIANI (*with a comical air*).

And I, too, dear Paolo, very delighted, I promise you.

PAUL (*to* MADAME DE ROCANÈRE).

My presence surprises you, marchioness? Believe me, it is a very painful thing to me, (*significantly*) as well as to yourself, I fancy, to revisit a house where every step awakens so many echoes, so many memories!

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE (*somewhat embarrassed*).

Alas! dear Maria-Antonia!

COUNTESS OF FODER.

Ah! yes, it is very sad indeed. — But I wanted a pair of horses.

PAUL.

And Madame de Rocanère sacrificed her own feelings to accompany you. That is what I call a kind friend. Is it the bay pair that tempts you?

COUNTESS OF FODER.

Just so, the two high-steppers. I am wild over them.

PAUL.

I fancy they will bring a high price.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

And you have come —?

PAUL.

I have come to withdraw from the sale a few objects of art to which I know that she was much attached — an old harpsichord — an Italian viola. She was very scrupulous about taking nothing away, but the liquidator has authorized me and to-night they will all be shipped to Ajaccio.

(*Bursts of laughter at the right, from* ESTHER'S *party.*)

CHEMINEAU.

I swear to you, Madame la Maréchale —

PAUL (*looking toward* ESTHER).

Allow me to go and pay my respects to Mesdames de Sélény.

(*He crosses the stage.*)

THE NOTARY.

Monsieur Astier!

(PAUL *stops at his table a moment.*)

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

That 's a very delicate attention on his part.

COUNTESS OF FODER (*with perfect sincerity*).

Ah! always correct.

COUNT ADRIANI (*comically*).

Yes — *correzione* — Cristo!

CHEMINEAU (*to* PAUL, *whom he joins at the notary's table*).

Come, come! They are getting impatient. — You may begin, monsieur le notaire.

(*Stir in the crowd at the back of the stage.*)

PAUL (*to the* MARÉCHALE).

The loveliest flowers in the rosarium are no fresher than you, madame la maréchale.

CHEMINEAU.

I have already told her so, my friend, — (*Aside.*) — I remembered your lesson.

THE NOTARY (*at his table*).

Silence, please! — we offer for sale a pair of pistols in their case. — I am offered two hundred francs.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Two hundred and fifty.

VAILLANT (*in the crowd*).

Three hundred.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Four hundred.

VAILLANT.

Five hundred.

(*Murmur in the crowd.*)

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Oh! this is too much. Six hundred.

VAILLANT.

Seven hundred.

MADAME DE ROCANÈRE.

Eight hundred.

VAILLANT.

A thousand!

THE NOTARY.

I am offered a thousand francs. Do I hear any more? Once! twice! thrice! — adjudged!

SCENE VI.

THE SAME, HEURTEBIZE.

HEURTEBIZE (*enters at the right, with the register.* — *Aside*).

Well, Père Vaillant was bound to have his souvenir — a thousand francs! — (*Aloud, approaching* ESTHER.) — Mademoiselle, here is the book you asked for.

ESTHER (*pointing to the nearest box containing an orange-tree*).

Very well. Put it there. (*To* PAUL.) Something that I want to show you. You come too, and look, Aunt Kate.

THE MARÉCHALE (*approaching with evident embarrassment*).

No, no, later. This is not the time. The sale is much more interesting.

ESTHER (*to* PAUL, *pointing to the register*).

Look there and see what I wrote on my first visit to Mousseaux. It was last April, five months ago, — about the fifteenth, was n't it, aunt?

THE MARÉCHALE (*more and more embarrassed*).

Why, my child, how do you expect me to remember? — (*To* CHEMINEAU.) — Just at that time I was fairly out of my head. I was in one of my paroxysms of weeping.

CHEMINEAU (*playfully*).

The defunct moved in his grave.

THE MARÉCHALE.

What did you say?

CHEMINEAU.

Why, yes, he came back on the water. There 's no harm in that.

PAUL (*turning the leaves of the register*).

Fifteenth of April, here it is. — (*Reading.*) — "Count Adriani, exempt at the *gardes-nobles.* — Sentiment of Solomon." — (*Imitating* ADRIANI'S *accent.*) — "Love is stronger than death." — (*Pointing to the* MARCHIONESS, *who is trying the old harpsichord, while* ADRIANI *listens, leaning languishly over her.*) — An excellent prophet, that Solomon. He had divined Madame de Rocanère.

ESTHER.

It was really she who cured him of your sword-thrust.

PAUL (*reading*).

"Maréchale de Sélény, the great man's widow."

ESTHER (*merrily*).

And what did dear Aunt Kate write for a sentiment?

THE MARÉCHALE.

These girls are unendurable!

PAUL (*reading*).

"Sentiment of Joubert. A woman can be a wife and widow with dignity but once."

CHEMINEAU (*jestingly, to the* MARÉCHALE).

Why, that is excellent. I trust that it will never happen to you to be a widow but once. Indeed I promise absolutely that it shall not.

THE MARÉCHALE (*to* CHEMINEAU.)

Laughter and wit. — (*She taps him with her fan.*) — Ah! you are a true Frenchman.

CHEMINEAU (*walking away with her, whispers to her*).

Heart! flower! star!

PAUL (*reading*).

And lastly: "Comtesse Esther de Sélény."

ESTHER.

My sentiment is n't long, but it 's neither from Solomon nor Joubert. It is my own.

PAUL.

And in English.

ESTHER.

Yes, that was in better form and more discreet.

PAUL (*reading*).

I shall return.

ESTHER.

In French, *Je reviendrai.* — (*To* PAUL, *passionately.*) And I have returned to this royal domain of Mousseaux. I have returned, as I had promised myself, as châtelaine.

— (*In a lower tone.*) — And on your arm. When I want a thing, I want it fervently.

(*She closes the register with an energetic gesture. — Excitement in the Orangery. Horses are being led to and fro.*)

CHEMINEAU (*running toward* MESDAMES DE ROCANÈRE *and* FODER).

Attention, mesdames. You must come this way. They are going to sell the horses out on the lawn.

THE MARÉCHALE (*in the distance*).

Esther, you want some horses, you know.

ESTHER.

Yes, yes, we are coming. — (*Detaining* PAUL *at the front of the stage, under the great orange-tree, their heads almost among the leaves.*) — What is the matter? Why this gloomy air? Did some phantom, one of your fair companions of other days, appear to you as you came through the park, at the corner of a path?

PAUL.

I don't believe in ghosts, I never saw one.

(*At this moment* VAILLANT *passes, watching* PAUL, *then goes off at the left. The crowd and horses at the back of the stage.*)

SCENE VII.

ESTHER, PAUL ASTIER; *the crowd in the background.*

PAUL.

What you call my gloomy air, my dear Esther, is my mask, my official, worldly mask. But listen to what I

say. Until this day, until this blessed moment, I have dealt with life as a medley of savage and greedy ambitions. I have walked straight onward, unhampered, without scruples, without bowels of compassion. I have been hard, I have been cynical. That is not my fault. I am a product of my time, and others are coming behind me who will be even more implacable.

(*Uproar of the sale.*)

THE NOTARY'S VOICE.

Silence, please!

PAUL.

Now I love you, my Esther, you, the only person to whom I have ever said it without lying. I love you! And the feeling is so novel, so strange! — a tranquillizing, a relaxation of my whole being, something grand and sweet, which envelops me, disarms me, and, if you choose, will make me a different man, change all my combative instincts to kindliness.

ESTHER (*smiling*).

Ah! *mon Dieu*, my friend, you terrify me! Are you often taken with an attack of blessing the bells like that?

PAUL.

No, not often, I give you my word.

ESTHER.

Good, I am glad. Just pluck this white cluster for me, just over my head. No, not that one, the other, higher up; the blossoms are even finer and more perfect.

THE NOTARY (*outside*).

We offer next a pair of harness horses, perfectly broken and matched.

ESTHER (*to* PAUL, *as he offers her the flowers*).

No, keep it. — It is myself. It is yours. I give myself to you.

PAUL.

Thanks!

(*He stoops to kiss her hand.*)

ESTHER.

A wasted kiss, you see. I have on my glove.

PAUL.

Here, then.

(*He turns back her glove with a quick movement and brushes a patch of bare arm with his lips.*)

ESTHER.

Be careful. — People can see us.

PAUL (*coldly, without turning*).

No, no one.

ESTHER (*smiling*).

Always self-possessed. And I prefer you so, I want you so, — with your cold eyes that burn, your bold, resolute mouth! I am like that myself, presumptuous and wilful.

THE NOTARY.

I am offered fifteen thousand francs.

A VOICE.

Sixteen thousand.

ANOTHER VOICE.

Seventeen thousand.

A VOICE.

Eighteen thousand.

(*Outcries of the bidders.*)

THE MARÉCHALE (*at the back of the stage, desperately*).

Esther! Esther! come, in heaven's name!

(*Exit.*)

A VOICE.

Twenty thousand.

PAUL (*to* ESTHER).

Stay — (*At the top of his voice, turning toward the crowd.*) — Twenty-five thousand!

(*Sensation outside.*)

THE NOTARY (*like an echo*).

Twenty-five thousand! I am offered twenty-five thousand francs!

PAUL (*to* ESTHER).

The pair are worth that, and I desire to present them to you.

ESTHER.

Present them to me? As a wedding gift, then? (*Shaking his hand.*) Done!

THE NOTARY.

Twenty-five thousand — once! twice! —

ESTHER (*to* PAUL).

I have wealth and beauty; you, power and unlimited audacity. A woman like me, a man like you —

PAUL (*embracing her*).

Together we will rule the world.

ESTHER (*impulsively*).

The vile world, my beloved master!

(VALLANT *has entered a moment before, at the left, and seems to be waiting until the lovers' colloquy is at an end.*

SCENE VIII.

THE SAME, VALLANT.

VALLANT (*approaching them*).

Monsieur Paul Astier?

THE NOTARY (*at the back of the stage*).

Do I hear any more?—once! twice!—

PAUL *turns, and* VALLANT *guides* ESTHER *aside and makes answer to the notary, who stops him with a gesture of his left hand.*

VALLANT.

We struggle for life, eh, young man?

THE NOTARY.

Three!

VALLANT *takes a pistol from his overcoat pocket, as he speaks.*

The strong devours the weak. (*He takes aim and fires.*) That being so, I suppress you, villain!

THE NOTARY (*outside*).

Adjudged!

(PAUL *turns and falls dead at* ESTHER'S *feet. Shriek of horror, commotion in the crowd, horses rear.*)

VAILLANT (*with a sweeping gesture, pointing upward*).

Adjudged! — that is the fitting word.

THE END.

ALPHONSE
DAUDET

THE IMMORTAL
THE STRUGGLE
FOR LIFE

Illustrated

Illustrated

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